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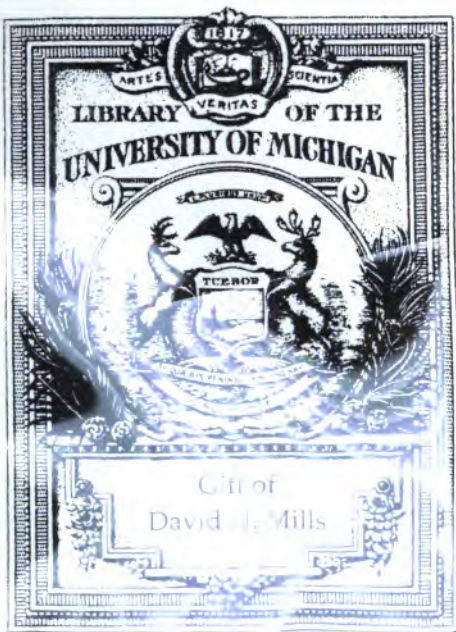
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THE YOUNG FRANC-TIREURS





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James Lapp

Dec 24th 1871

From his affectionate Aunt
Mary Ann & Cousin Alice

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L.F. 49

12-49



Blowing up the Bridge.—Page 163.

THE YOUNG FRANCO- TIREURS

And their Adventures in the Franco-
Prussian War.

BY

G. A. HENTY,

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT OF THE "STANDARD," AND AUTHOR OF "A MARCH
TO MAGDALA," "OUT ON THE PAMPAS," &c.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY R. T. LANDELLS,

ARTIST TO THE "ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS."



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A WORD TO MY YOUNG READERS.

IN a tale like the present, written so soon after the termination of a great war, it is difficult, indeed impossible, for me to avoid running occasionally counter to some of your prejudices and opinions. Some of your fathers and friends took the French side, some espoused the German, and you naturally shared the opinion of those around you. I can only say that I have endeavoured to be strictly impartial, and to tread as lightly as possible upon the corns of either side. Throughout the story, the names, places, and dates have been changed, but circumstances and facts are true. There were a good many English among the franc-tireurs, and boys of from fifteen to sixteen were by no means uncommon in their ranks. Having been abroad during the whole of the war, I saw a good

deal of the franc-tireurs, and had several intimate friends amongst them. Upon the whole, these corps did much less service to the cause of France than might have been reasonably expected of them. They were too often badly led, and were sometimes absolutely worse than useless. But there were brilliant exceptions, and there were very many of those daring actions performed, which, while requiring heroism and courage of the highest kind, are unknown to the world in general, and find no place in history. Many of the occurrences in this tale are related almost in the words in which they were described to me by those who took part in them, and nearly every fact and circumstance actually occurred according to my own knowledge. Without aspiring to the rank of a history, however slight, the story will give you a fair idea of what the life of the franc-tireurs was, of what some of them actually went through, suffered, and performed.

Yours sincerely,

THE AUTHOR.



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THE YOUNG FRANC-TIREURS.

CHAPTER I.

THE OUTBREAK OF WAR.

THE usually quiet old town of Dijon was in a state of excitement. There were groups of people in the streets, especially round the corners where the official placards were posted up. Both at the Prefecture and the Mairie there were streams of callers all day. Every functionary wore an air of importance and mystery, and mounted orderlies galloped here and there at headlong speed. The gendarmes had twisted their moustaches to even finer points than usual, and walked about with the air of men who knew all about the matter, and had gone through more serious affairs than this was likely to be.

In the market-place the excitement and the buzz of conversation were at their highest. It was the market-day, and the whole area of the square was full. Never, in the memory of the oldest inhabitant, had such a market been seen in Dijon.

For the ten days preceding, France had been on the

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tip-toe of expectation, and every peasant's wife and daughter, for miles round the town, had come with their baskets of eggs, fowls, or fruits, to attend the market and to hear the news. So crowded was it that it was really difficult to move about. People were not, however, unmindful of bargains, for the French peasant woman is a thrifty body, and has a shrewd eye to *sous*, so the chaffering and haggling which almost invariably precede each purchase went on as briskly as usual, but between times all thoughts and all tongues ran upon the great event of the day. It was certain, quite certain now, that there was to be war with Prussia. The newspapers had said so for some days, but then, bah! who believes a newspaper? M. le Prefect had published the news to-day, and every one knows that M. le Prefect is not a man to say a thing unless it were true. Most likely the Emperor himself had written to him. Oh! there could be no doubt about it now.

It was singular to hear, amidst all the talk, that the speculation and argument turned but little upon the chances of the war itself, it being tacitly assumed to be a matter of course that the Germans would be defeated with ease by the French; the great subject of speculation was upon the points which directly affected the speakers. Would the Mobiles be called out, and forced to march? Would soldiers who had served their time be recalled to the service, even if they were married; and would next year's conscripts be called out at once? These were the questions which every one asked, but no one could answer. In another day or two it was probable that the orders respecting these matters would arrive, and in the



mean time the merry Burgundian girls endeavoured to hide their own uneasiness by laughingly predicting an early summons to arms to the young men of their acquaintance.

At the Lycée or great school the boys are just coming out. They are too excited to attend to lessons, and have been released hours before their usual time. They troop out from the great doors, talking and gesticulating. Their excitement, however, takes a different form to that which that of English boys would do under the same circumstances. There was no shouting, no pushing, no practical jokes. The French boy does not play; at least he does not play roughly. When young he does indeed sometimes play at *buchon*, a game something similar to the game of buttons as played by English street-boys; he may occasionally play at marbles; but after twelve years of age he puts aside games as beneath him. Prisoners' base, foot-ball, and cricket are alike unknown to him, and he considers any exertion which would disarrange his hair or his shirt-collar as barbarous and absurd. His amusements are walking in the public promenade, talking politics with the gravity of a man of sixty, and discussing the local news and gossip. This is the general type of French school-boy. Of course there are many exceptions, and in the Lycée of Dijon these were more numerous than usual.

This was due to a great extent to the influence of the two boys who are coming out of the school at the present moment. Ralph and Percy Barclay are, as one can see at first sight, English; that is to say, their father is English, and they have taken after him, and not after

their French mother. They are French born, for they first saw the light at the pretty cottage where they still live, about two miles out of the town ; but their father, Captain Barclay, has brought them up as English boys, and they have been for two years at a school in England. Their example has had some effect : their cousins, Louis and Philippe Duburg, are almost as fond of cricket and other games, and of taking long rambles for miles round, as they are themselves ; other boys have also taken to these amusements, and consequently you would see more square figures, more healthy faces at the Lycée at Dijon than at most other French schools.

The boys who joined in these games formed a set in themselves apart from the rest. They were called either the English set, or contemptuously "the savages ;" but this latter name was not often applied to them before their faces, for the young Barclays had learnt to box in England, and their cousins as well as a few of the others had practised with the gloves with them. Consequently although "the savages" might be wondered at and sneered at behind their backs, the offensive name was never applied in their hearing.

At the present moment Ralph Barclay was the centre of a knot of lads of his own age.

"And so you don't think that we shall get to Berlin, Ralph Barclay ; you think that these Prussian louts are going to beat the French army ? Look now, it is a little strong to say that in a French town."

"But I don't say that at all," Ralph Barclay said. "You are talking as if it was a certainty that we were oing to march over the Prussians ; I simply say, don't be

too positive. There can be no doubt about the courage of the French army, but pluck alone won't do ; the question is, are our generals and our organization as good as those of the Prussians, and can we put as many, or anything like as many men into the field? I am at least half French, and hope with all my heart that we shall thrash these Germans ; but we know that they are good soldiers, and it is safer not to begin to brag till the work is over."

There was silence for a minute or two after Ralph ceased speaking. The fact was, the thought that perhaps France might be defeated had never once before presented itself to them as possible. They were half disposed to be angry with the English boy for stating it, but it was, in the first place, evident, now that they thought of it, that it was just possible, and, in the second place, a quarrel with Ralph Barclay was a thing which all his school-fellows avoided.

Ralph Barclay was nearly sixteen, his brother a year younger. Their father, Captain Barclay, had lost a leg in one of the innumerable wars in India, two or three years before the outbreak of the Crimean war. He returned to England, and was recommended by his doctors to spend the winter in the south of France. This he did, and shortly after his arrival at Pau he had fallen in love with Melanie Duburg, daughter of a landed proprietor near Dijon, and who was stopping there with a relative. A month later he called upon her father at Dijon, and in the spring they were married. Captain Barclay's half-pay, a small private income, and the little fortune which his wife brought him, were ample to enable

him to live comfortably in France, and there accordingly he had settled down.

His family consisted of Ralph, Percy, and a daughter, called after her mother, Melanie, and who was two years younger than Percy. It had always been Captain Barclay's intention to return to England when the time came for the boys to enter into some business or profession, and he had kept up his English connexion by several visits there of some months' duration, with his whole family. The boys too had been for two years at school in England, as well as for two years in Germany, and they spoke the three languages with equal fluency.

A prettier abode than that of Captain Barclay would be difficult to find. It was in no particular style of architecture, and would have horrified a lover of the classic. It was half Swiss, half Gothic, and altogether French. It had numerous little gables, containing the funniest shaped little rooms. It had a high roof with projecting eaves, and round three sides ran a wide veranda, with a trellis-work, over which vines were closely trained, subduing the glare of the summer sun, casting a cool green shade over the sitting-rooms, and affording a pretty and delightfully cool retreat, where Mrs. Barclay generally sat with her work and taught Melanie, moving round the house with the sun, so as to be always in the shade.

The drawing and dining rooms both opened into this veranda. The road came up to the back of the house, and upon the other three sides was a garden which was a compromise between the English and French styles. It had a smooth, well-mown lawn, with a few patches of bright flowers which were quite English, and mixed up

among them and beyond them were clumps of the graceful foliaged plants and shrubs in which the French delight. Beyond was a vineyard, with its low rows of vines, while over these the view stretched away to the towers of Dijon.

In the veranda the boys upon their return found Captain Barclay reading the papers and smoking. He looked up as they entered.

"You are back early, boys."

"Yes, papa, there was so much talking going on that the professor gave it up as hopeless. You have heard the news, of course?"

"Yes, boys, and am very sorry to hear it."

Captain Barclay spoke so gravely that Ralph asked anxiously, "Don't you think we shall thrash them, papa?"

"I consider it very doubtful, Ralph," his father said. "Prussia has already gained an immense moral victory. She has chosen her own time for war, and has at the same time obliged France to take the initiative, and so to appear to be the aggressor, and therefore to lose the moral support of Europe. She has forced this quarrel upon France, and yet nine-tenths of Europe look upon France as the inciter of the war. History will show the truth, but it will then be too late. As it is, France enters upon the war with the weight of public opinion dead against her, and, what is worse, she enters upon it altogether unprepared, whereas Prussia has been getting ready for years."

"But the French always have shown themselves to be better soldiers than the Prussians, papa."

"So they have, Percy; and equally well led, disciplined, and organized, I believe that in anything like equal

forces they would do so again. The question is, have we generals to equal those who led the Prussians to victory against Austria? is our discipline equal, or anything like equal, to that of the Prussians? is our organization as good as theirs? and lastly, have we any thing like their numbers? I don't like the look of it, boys, at all. We ought, according to published accounts, to be able to put a larger army than theirs in the field just at first, and if we were but prepared, should certainly be able to carry all before us for a while. I question very much if we are so prepared. Supposing it to be so, however, the success would, I fear, be but temporary, for the German reserves are greatly superior to ours. Discipline, too, has gone off sadly since I first knew the French army. Radical opinions may be very wise and very excellent for a nation, for aught I know, but it is certain that they are fatal to the discipline of an army. My own opinion, as you know, is that they are equally fatal for a country, but that is a matter of opinion only; but of the fact that a good Radical makes an extremely bad soldier I am quite clear, and the spread of Radical opinion among the French army has been very great. Then, too, the officers have been much to blame. They think of pleasure far more than duty; they spend four times as much time in the cafés and billiard-rooms as they do in the drill ground. Altogether, in my opinion, the French army has greatly gone off in all points except in courage, which, being a matter of nationality, is probably as high as ever. It is a bad look-out, boys—a very bad look-out. There, don't talk about it any more. I do not want to make your mother unhappy. Remember not to express, either as

my or your own opinion, any thing I have said, in the town. It would only render you obnoxious, and might even cause serious mischief. If things go wrong, French mobs are liable to wreak their bad temper on the first comer."

"Percy," Mrs. Barclay said, coming into the room, "please to run down to the end of the garden and cut some lettuces for salad. Marie is so upset that she can do nothing."

"What is the matter with her, mamma?" both the boys asked at once.

"Victor Harvé—you knew him—the son of the blacksmith Harvé, who had served his time in the army, and came back two months ago to join his father in his forge and to marry our Marie, has left to join his regiment. He was here an hour since to say good-bye. By this time he will have started. It is not wonderful that she weeps; she may never see him again. I have told her that she must be brave; a Frenchwoman should not grudge those she loves most to fight for France."

"Ah! Melanie," Captain Barclay said, smiling, "these little patriotic outbursts are delightful when one does not have to practise them at one's own expense. 'It is sweet and right to die for one's country,' said the old Roman, and every one agrees with him, but, at the same time, every individual man has a strong objection to put himself in the way of this sweet and proper death. Although, as you say, no Frenchwoman should grudge her love to her country, I fancy if a *levée en masse* took place to-morrow, and the boys as well as the cripples had to go, so that Ralph, Percy, and I were all obliged to march,

you would feel that you did grudge us to the country most amazingly.

Mrs. Barclay turned a little pale at the suggestion. "Ah! I can't suppose that, Richard. You are English, and they cannot touch you or the boys, even if you could march and if they were old enough."

Captain Barclay smiled. "That is no answer, Melanie; you are shirking the question. I said if they were to make us go."

"Ah, yes! I am afraid I should grudge you, Richard, and the boys, except the enemy were to invade France, and then every one, even we women, would fight; but of that there is no chance; it is we who will invade."

Captain Barclay made no reply.

"The plums want gathering, papa," Percy said, returning from cutting the lettuces. "It was arranged that our cousins should come over when they were ripe, and have a regular picking. They have no plums, and Madame Duburg wants them for preserving. May we go over after dinner, and ask them to come in at three o'clock and spend the evening?"

"Certainly," Captain Barclay said; "and you can give your mamma's compliments, and ask if your uncle and Madame Duburg will come in after they have dined. The young ones will make their dinner at our six o'clock tea."

In France early dinner is a thing scarcely known, even among the peasantry, that is to say, their meals are taken at somewhat the same time as ours are, but are called by different names. The Frenchman never eats what we call breakfast, that is, he never makes a really heavy

meal the first thing in the morning. He takes, however, coffee and milk and bread-and-butter when he gets up. He does not call this breakfast. He speaks of it as his morning coffee, and takes his breakfast at eleven or half-past eleven, or even at twelve. This is a regular meal, with soup, meat, and wine. In England it would be called an early lunch. At six o'clock the Frenchman dines, and even the working man calls this meal, which an English labourer would call supper, his dinner. The Barclays' meals, therefore, differed more in name than in reality from those of their neighbours.

Louis and Philippe Duburg came in at five o'clock, but brought a message that their sisters would come in with their father and mother later. Melanie was neither surprised nor disappointed at the non-arrival of her cousins. She greatly preferred being with the boys, and always felt uncomfortable with Julie and Justine, who, although little older than herself, were already as prim, decorous, and properly behaved, as if they had been women of thirty years old.

After tea was over, the four boys returned to their work of gathering plums, while Melanie, or Milly, as her father called her, to distinguish her from her mother, picked up the plums that fell, handed up fresh baskets and received the full ones, and laughed and chattered with her brothers and cousins. While so engaged, M. and Madame Duburg arrived with their daughters Julie and Justine.

M. Duburg, Mrs. Barclay's brother, was proprietor of a considerable estate planted almost entirely with vines. His income was a large one, for the soil was favourable,

and he carried on the culture with such care and attention that the wines fetched a higher price than any in the district. He was a clear-headed, sensible man, with a keen eye to a bargain. He was fond of his sister and her English husband, and had offered no opposition to his boys entering into the games and amusements of their cousins, although his wife was constantly urging him to do so. It was to Madame Duburg a terrible thing that her boys, instead of being always tidy and orderly, and ready when at home to accompany her for a walk, should come home flushed, hot, and untidy, with perhaps a swelled cheek or a black eye, from the effects of a blow from a cricket ball or boxing-glove.

Upon their arrival at Captain Barclay's the two gentlemen strolled out to smoke a cigar together, and to discuss the prospects of the war and its effects upon prices.

Mr. Barclay had asked Julie and Justine if they would like to go down to the orchard, but Madame Duburg had so hurriedly answered in their name in a negative, saying that they would stroll round the garden until Melanie returned, that Mrs. Barclay had no resource but to ask them when they passed near the orchard to call Milly, in her name, to join them in the garden.

"My dear Melanie," Madame Duburg began, when her daughters had walked away in a quiet, prim manner, hand in hand, "I was really quite shocked as we came along. There was Melanie laughing and calling out as loudly as the boys themselves, handing up baskets and lifting others down, with her hair all in confusion, and looking—excuse my saying so—more like a peasant girl than a young lady.

Mrs. Barclay smiled quietly. "Milly is enjoying herself, no doubt, sister-in-law, and I do not see that her laughing or calling out or handing baskets will do her any serious harm. As for her hair, five minutes' brushing will set that right."

"But, my dear sister-in-law," Madame Duburg said, earnestly, "do you recall to yourself that Milly is nearly fourteen years old, that she will soon be becoming a woman, that in another three years you will be searching for a husband for her? My faith, it is terrible, and she has yet no figure, no manner;" and Madame Duburg looked with an air of gratified pride at the stiff figures of her own two girls.

"Her figure is not a bad one, sister-in-law," Mrs. Barclay said composedly; "she is taller than Julie, who is six months her senior; she is as straight as an arrow. Her health is admirable; she has never had a day's illness."

"But she cannot walk; she absolutely cannot walk!" Madame Duburg said, lifting up her hands in horror.

"She walked upwards of twelve miles with her father yesterday," Mrs. Barclay said, pretending to misunderstand her sister-in-law's meaning.

"I did not mean that," Madame Duburg said, impatiently, "but she walks like a peasant girl. My faith, it is shocking to say, but she walks like a boy. I should be desolated to see my daughter step out in that way. Then look at her manners. My word, she has no manners at all. The other day when I was here, and M. de Riviere with his sons called, she was awkward and shy; yes, indeed, she was positively awkward and shy. It is

dreadful for me to have to say so, sister-in-law, but it is true. No manners, no ease! Julie, and even Justine, can receive visitors even as I could do myself."

"Her manners are not formed yet, sister-in-law," Mrs. Barclay said quietly, "nor do I care that they should be. She is a young girl at present, and I do not wish to see her a woman before her time. In three years it will be time enough for her to mend her manners."

"But in three years, sister-in-law, you will be looking for a husband for her."

"I shall be doing nothing of the sort," Mrs. Barclay said steadily. "In that, as in many other matters, I greatly prefer the English ways. As you know, we give up our house in two years, and go to England to reside. We have economized greatly during the seventeen years since our marriage. We can afford to live in England now. At sixteen, therefore, Milly will have good masters, and for two years her education will be carried on, and her walk and manner will no doubt improve. In England fathers and mothers do not arrange the marriage of their children, and Milly will have to do as other girls do, that is, wait until some one falls in love with her and she falls in love with him. Then, if he is a proper person and has enough to keep her, they will be married."

Madame Duburg was too much shocked at the expression of these sentiments to answer at once. She only sighed, shook her head, and looked upwards.

"It is strange," she said at last, "to hear you, sister-in-law, a Frenchwoman, speak so lightly of marriage. As if a young girl could know as well as her parents who is a fit and proper person for her to marry; besides, the

idea of a young girl falling in love before she marries is shocking, quite shocking!"

"My dear sister-in-law," Mrs. Barclay said, "we have talked this matter over before, and I have always stated my opinion frankly. I have seen a good deal in England, and have seen, therefore, and know the result of English marriages. I know also what French marriages are, and no one who does know the state of things in the two countries can hesitate for a moment in declaring that married life in England is infinitely happier, in every respect, than it is in France. The idea of telling your daughter that she is to marry a man whom she has never seen, as we do in France, is, to my mind, simply monstrous. Fortunately, I myself married for love, and I have been happy ever since. I intend Milly, when the time comes, to do the same thing."

Before Madame Duburg had time to answer, the gentlemen joined them, and the conversation turned upon the war. In a short time the three girls came up.

"What a rosy little thing you are, Milly," her uncle said; "where do you get your plump cheeks and your bright colour? I wish you could give the receipt to Julie and Justine. Why, if you were to blow very hard, I do think you would blow them both down."

"I am really surprised at you, Monsieur Duburg," his wife said, angrily. "I am sure I do not wish Julie and Justine to have as much colour as their cousin. I consider it quite a misfortune for poor Milly; it is so very commonplace. Poor child, she looks as if she had been working at the vintage."

"That is right, Madame; stand up for your own," and

her husband, who was accustomed to his wife's speeches, laughed. "But, for all that, commonplace or not commonplace, I should like to see some of Milly's bright, healthy colour in my girls' cheeks, and I should like to see them walk as if they had forgotten for a moment their tight boots and high heels."

His wife was about to make an angry reply, when the arrival of the four boys, bearing in triumph the last basket of plums, changed the conversation; and shortly afterwards Madame Duburg, remarking that the evening was damp, and that she did not like Julie and Justine to be out in it any later, the Duburgs took their leave.



CHAPTER II.

TERRIBLE NEWS.

THE ten days succeeding the declaration of war were days of excitement and anticipation. The troops quartered at Dijon moved forward at once, and scarcely an hour passed but long trains, filled with soldiers from Lyons and the South, were on their way up towards Metz.

The people of Dijon spent half their time in and around the station. The platform was kept clear, but bands of ladies relieved each other every few hours, and handed soup, bread, fruit, and wine to the soldiers as they passed through. Each crowded train was greeted as it approached the station with cheers and waving of handkerchiefs, to which the troops as heartily responded. Most of the trains were decorated with boughs, and presented a gay appearance, as, filled with the little line men, the sun-burnt Zouaves, swarthy Turcos, gay hussars, or sober artillerymen, they wound slowly into the town.

Some of the trains were less gay, but were not less

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significant of war. Long lines of waggons, filled with cannon, open trucks with the deadly shell, arranged side by side, point upwards, and looking more like eggs in a basket than deadly missiles, came and went. There, too, were long trains of pontoons for forming bridges, while every half-hour long lines of waggons filled with biscuits, barrels of wine, sacks of coffee, and cases of stores of all sorts and kinds passed through.

The enthusiasm of Dijon at the sight of this moving panorama of war rose to fever heat. The sound of the "Marseillaise" resounded from morning to night; victory was looked upon as certain, and the only subject of debate was as to the terms which victorious France would impose upon conquered Prussia.

The only impatience felt was for the news of the first victory.

Captain Barclay sent down several casks of wine for the use of the passing troops, and his wife went down each day to assist at the distribution. In the evening she and Milly scraped old rags, to make lint for the wounded.

The Lycée was still closed, as it was found impossible to get the boys to attend to their studies, and Ralph and Percy spent their time in watching the trains go past, and in shouting themselves hoarse.

Captain Barclay did not share in the general enthusiasm, and each morning at breakfast he looked more and more grave as upon opening the papers he found there was still no news of the commencement of hostilities.

"What difference does it make, papa?" Ralph asked one day, "we are sending fresh troops up every hour,

and I do not see how a few days' delay can be any disadvantage to us."

"It makes all the difference, Ralph ; all the difference in the world. We had a considerably larger standing army than the Prussians, and had the advantage that the main body of our troops were very much nearer to the frontier than those of the Prussians. If things had been ready, we ought to have marched two hundred thousand men into Germany, three or four days, at latest, after the declaration of war. The Germans could have had no force capable of resisting them. We should have had the prestige of a first success—no slight thing with a French army—and we should also have had the great and solid advantage of fighting in an enemy's country, instead of upon our own. The German reserves are far greater than our own ; we know how perfect their organization is, and every hour of delay is an immense advantage to them. It is quite likely now, that instead of the French invading Germany, it will be the Prussians who will invade France."

The boys were but little affected by their father's forebodings ; it was scarcely possible to suppose that every one could be wrong ; still more impossible to believe that those great hosts which they saw passing, so full of high hope and eager courage, could be beaten. They were, however, very glad to sit round the table of an evening while Captain Barclay opened a great map on the table, explained the strength of the various positions, and the probability of this or that line of attack being selected by one or the other army.

Day after day went by, until, on the 2nd of August,

the news came at last. The first blow had been struck, the first blood shed—the French had taken Saarbruck.

“It is too late,” Captain Barclay said, as Ralph and Percy rushed in to say that the news was posted up at the Prefecture. “It is too late, boys. The English papers of this morning have brought us the news that the Germans are massing at least seven or eight hundred thousand men along the line from SaarLouis to Spiers. It is evident that they fell back from Saarbruck without any serious resistance. In another two or three days they will be in readiness, and as they must far outnumber our men, you will see that the advantage at Saarbruck will not be followed up, and that the Prussians will assume the offensive.”

“Then what do you really think will be the result, papa?”

“I think, Ralph, that we shall be forced to do what, not having at once taken the offensive, we ought to have done from the first. We shall have to fall back, to abandon the line of frontier, which is altogether indefensible, and to hold the line of the Moselle, and the spurs of the Vosges, an immensely strong position, and which we ought to be able to hold against all the efforts of Prussia.”

The exultation of Dijon was but short-lived, for on the 5th the boys came up in the afternoon from the town with very serious faces.

“What is the matter, Ralph?”

“There is a rumour in the town, papa, that the Swiss papers have published an account of the capture of Weissenburg by the Prussians; a great many French

are said to be prisoners. Do you think it can be true?"

"It is probable, at any rate, Ralph. The Swiss papers would, of course, get the news an hour or so after it is known in Germany. We must not begin by believing all that the telegram says, because both sides are certain to claim victories; still, the absolute capture of a town is a matter upon which there can be no dispute, and is therefore likely enough to be true. We know the Prussians were massed all along that line, and, as I expected, they have taken the offensive. Their chances of success in so doing were evident, as neither party know where the others are preparing to strike a blow, and each can therefore concentrate, and strike with an overwhelming force at any given point. Now that the Germans have made the first move, and shown their intention, both parties will concentrate in that direction. You see, from Weissenburg the Germans can either march south upon Strasburg, or south-west upon Metz or Nancy, but to reach this latter place they will have to cross the spurs of the Vosges. The French will, of course, try to bar their further advance. We may expect a great battle in a day or two."

The news came but too soon, for two days later Dijon as well as all France stood aghast at the news of the utter rout of MacMahon's division, after the desperately-contested battle of Wörth, and the not less decided, though less disastrous, defeats of the French left at Forbach, by the troops of Steinmetz. Some little consolation was however gleaned by the fact that the French had been beaten in detail, and had shown the utmost gallantry,

against greatly superior numbers. They would now, no doubt, fall back behind the Moselle, and hold that line and the position of the Vosges until fresh troops could come up, and a great battle be fought upon more even terms. Fresh levies were everywhere ordered, and a deep and general feeling of rage prevailed. No one thought of blaming the troops, it was evident that they had done their best, the fault lay with the generals, and with the organization.

Captain Barclay pointed out to the boys that the officers and men were somewhat to blame also, for the utter confusion which prevailed among MacMahon's troops in their retreat showed that the whole regimental system was faulty, and that there could have been no real discipline whatever, or the shattered regiments would have rallied a few miles from the field of battle.

In Dijon the change during the last fortnight was marvellous. The war spirit was higher than ever. Cost what it might, this disgrace must be wiped out. The Mobiles were hard at work drilling; the soldiers who had long left the army were starting by every train to the depôts; the sound of the "Marseillaise" rang through the streets night and day. The chorus "To arms" gained a fresh meaning and power, and, in spite of these first defeats, none dreamt of final defeat. Every day, however, the news became worse. Strasburg was cut off, and the Prussians marched unopposed across the spurs of the Vosges, where a mere handful of men might have checked them.

"Boys, there are terrible days in store for France," Captain Barclay said, when the news came that the

enemy had entered Nancy. "The line of the Moselle is turned, Bazaine will be cut off unless he hurries his retreat, and then nothing can stop the Prussians from marching to Paris."

The boys sat speechless at this terrible assurance.

"Surely it cannot be as bad as that," Mrs. Barclay said; "Frenchmen cannot have lost all their old qualities, and all France will rise like one man to march to the defence of Paris."

"Raw levies will be of no use whatever against the Prussian troops, flushed with victory," Captain Barclay said, "even if they were armed; and where are the arms for a levy *en masse* to come from? If Bazaine be beaten, the only hope of France is for all the troops who remain to fall back under the guns of the forts of Paris, and for France to enter upon an immense guerilla war; for hosts of skirmishers to hang upon their flanks and rear, cutting every road, destroying every bridge, checking the movements of every detached body, and so actually starving them out on the ground which they occupy. This, however, will demand an immense amount of pluck, of endurance, of perseverance, of sacrifice, and of patriotism. The question is, does France possess these qualities?"

"Surely, Richard, you cannot doubt the patriotism of the French," Mrs. Barclay said, a little reproachfully.

"My dear Melanie," her husband said, "I am sorry to say that I very greatly doubt the patriotism of the French. They are—more than any people, more even than the English, whom they laugh at as a nation of shopkeepers—a money-making race. The *bourgeoise* class, the shopkeepers, the small proprietors, are selfish in the extreme.

They think only of their money, their business, and their comforts ; the lower class are perhaps better, but their first thoughts will be how the war will affect themselves ; and unless there is some chance of the enemy approaching their homes, driving off their cattle, and plundering their cottages, they will look on with a very calm eye at the general ruin. I believe, remember, that those who will be called out will go, and if affairs go as I fear that they will do, every man under fifty years old in France will have to go out ; but it is not enough to go out. For a war like this it will require desperate courage and endurance, and an absolute disregard of life to counterbalance the disadvantages of want of discipline, want of arms, want of artillery, and want of organization. I may be wrong, I hope that I am so, but time will show."

"And do you think that there is any chance of their coming down here, as well as of going to Paris, papa?" Percy asked.

"That would depend upon the length of the resistance, Percy. If France holds out, and refuses to grant any terms which the Prussians might try to impose upon them, they may overrun half the country, and as this town is directly upon their way for Lyons, the second town of France, they are exceedingly likely to come this way."

"Well, if they do, papa," Ralph said, with heightened colour, "I feel sure that every man who can carry a gun will go out, and that every home will be defended."

"We shall see, Ralph," Captain Barclay said, "we shall see."

Another pause, and then came the news of that terrible three days' fighting, on the 14th, 16th and 18th,

near Metz, when Bazaine, his retreat towards Paris cut off, vainly tried to force his way through the Prussian army, and failing, fell back into Metz. Even now, when the position was well-nigh desperate, with the only great army remaining shut up and surrounded, and with nothing save the fragment of MacMahon's division, with a few other regiments collected in haste, and the new levies, encamped at Chalons, between the victorious enemy and the capital—the people of France were scarcely awake to the urgency of the position. The Government concealed at least a portion of the truth, and the people were only too ready to be deceived.

In Dijon, however, the facts were better known and more understood. The Swiss newspapers containing the Prussian official telegrams and accounts arrived daily, and those who received them speedily spread the news through the town. The consternation was great and general, but there was no sign of despair. Those of the Mobs who were armed and equipped were sent off at once to Chalons. At every corner of the street were placards calling out the Mobs and soldiers who had served their time, and although not yet called to arms, the National Guard drilled in the Place d'Armes morning and evening.

"You will allow, Richard, that you were mistaken as to the patriotism of the people," Mrs. Barclay said one evening to her husband. "Everyone is rushing to arms."

"They are coming out better than I had expected, Melanie, but at the same time you will observe that they have no choice in the matter. The Mobs are called out, and have to go. All who can raise the most

frivolous pretext for exemption, do so. There is a perfect rush of young men to the Prefecture to obtain places in the clothing, medical, arming, and equipping departments, in any sort of service, in fact, which will exempt its holder from taking up arms. At the same time, there is a great deal of true, earnest patriotism. Many married men with families have volunteered, and those belonging to the categories called out, do go, as you say, cheerfully if not willingly; and, once enrolled, appear determined to do their duty. France will need all the patriotism and all the devotion of her people to get through the present crisis. There is no saying how it will end. I have no hope whatever that MacMahon's new army can arrest the march of the enemy, and his true course is to fall back upon Paris. Our chance here of remaining free from a visit of the enemy depends entirely upon the length of time which Strasburg and Metz holds out. Bazaine may be able to cut his way out, but at any rate, he is likely to remain where he is for some little time, under the walls of Metz, for he occupies the attention of a considerably larger force than that which he commands. The vital point at present is to cut the roads behind the Germans. If it were not for this cork leg of mine, Melanie, I would try and raise a small guerilla corps, and set out on my own account. I have lived here for seventeen years now, and the French fought by our side in the Crimea; could I do so, I should certainly fight for France now. It is clearly the duty of any one who can carry a musket to go out."

Just at this moment the door opened, and Ralph and

Percy entered hastily. They both looked excited, but serious.

"What is it, boys?"

"Papa," Ralph said, "there is a notice up, signed by your friend Captain Tempé. He calls for a hundred volunteers to join a corps of Franc-Tireurs, a sort of guerillas, I believe, to go out to harass the Germans, and cut their communication. Those who can are to provide their own arms and equipments, a meeting is to be held to-night for subscribing the money for those who cannot afford to do so. We have come to ask you to let us join, papa; Louis and Philippe have just gone to ask uncle's leave."

Captain Barclay listened in silence with a very grave face. Their mother sat down in a chair with a white face.

"Oh, my boys, you are too young," she gasped out.

"We are stronger, mamma, than a great many of the men who have been called out, and taller and stouter in every way; we can walk better than the greater portion of them. We are accustomed to exercise and fatigue, we are far more fit to be soldiers than many young men who have gone from here. You said yourself, mamma, that every one who could carry a gun ought to go out."

"But you are not French, boys," Mrs. Barclay said piteously.

"We are half French, mamma. Not legally, but it has been home to us since we were born; and even if you had not been French, we ought to fight for her."

Mrs. Barclay looked at her husband for assistance, but Captain Barclay had leaned his face in his hands, and said nothing.

"Ah, Ralph; but Percy at least, he is only fifteen."

“I am nearly as big, nearly as strong as Ralph, mamma. Besides, would it not be better to have two of us? If one is ill or—or wounded, the other could look after him, you know. Mamma, dearest, we have talked it over, and we think we ought to go. We are very strong for our ages, and it is strength not years which matters. Mamma, you said a Frenchwoman should not grudge those she loves to France, and that if France was invaded, all, even the women, should go out.”

Mrs. Barclay was silent; she could not speak. She was so deadly pale, and her face had such an expression of misery that the boys felt their resolution wavering.

Captain Barclay looked up. “Boys,” he said very gravely, “I have one question to ask which you will answer me truly upon your faith and honour. Do you wish to go merely, or principally, from a desire to see the excitement and the adventure of a guerilla war, or do you go out because you desire earnestly to do your best to defend the country in which you were born and lived? Are you prepared to suffer any hardship, and, if it is the will of God, to die for her?”

“We are, papa,” both boys said. And Ralph went on: “When we first talked over the possibility of every one being called out, and of our going too, we did look upon it as a case of fun and excitement; but when the chance really came, we saw how serious it was, we knew how much it would cost you and dear mamma, and we would not have asked you had we not felt that we ought to go, even if we knew we should be killed.”

“In that case, boys,” Captain Barclay said solemnly,

rising and laying one hand on the shoulder of each of his sons, "In that case I say no more. You are a soldier's sons, and your example may do good. It is your duty, and that of every one, to fight for his country. I give you my full consent to go. I should not have advised it; at your age there was no absolute duty, still, if you feel it so, I will not stand in your way. Go, then, my boys, and may God watch over you and keep you, and send you safe home again."

So saying, he kissed them both on the forehead, and walked from the room without saying another word.

Then the boys turned to their mother, who was crying silently, and, falling upon her neck, they kissed her and cried with her. It was understood that her consent was given with their father's. Milly coming in and hearing what was the matter, sat down in sudden grief and astonishment on the nearest chair, and cried bitterly.

It was a sad half-hour, and the boys were almost inclined to regret that they had asked for leave to go. However, there was no drawing back now, and when they left their mother, they went on to tell their cousins that they were going. They found Louis and Philippe in a state of great disappointment because their father had altogether refused to listen to their entreaties. Upon hearing, however, that Ralph and Percy were going they gained fresh hope, for they said, if English boys could go and fight for France, it was shameful that French boys should stay at home in idleness.

Captain Barclay, after giving permission to his sons to go as *Franc-Tireurs*, first went for a walk by himself, to think over the consequences of his decision. He

then went down into Dijon and called upon Captain Tempé.

The commander of the proposed corps had served for many years in the Zouaves, and was known to be an able and energetic officer. He had left the service five or six years previously upon his marriage. He lived a short distance only from Captain Barclay, and a warm friendship had sprung up between them. Upon Captain Barclay telling him why he had come to see him, Captain Tempé expressed his satisfaction at the decision of the young Barclays.

"I have already the names of one or two lads, little, if any older than your eldest boy," he said; "and although the other is certainly very young, yet as he is very stout and strong for his age, I have no doubt he will bear the fatigue as well as many of the men."

"I wish I could go with you," Captain Barclay said.

"I wish you could indeed," Captain Tempé replied warmly; "but with your leg you never could keep up on foot, and a horse would be out of the question among the forests of the Vosges mountains. You might, however, if you will, be of great use in assisting me to drill and discipline my recruits before starting."

"That I will do with pleasure," Captain Barclay said. "I had been thinking of offering my services in that way to the municipality, as very few of the officers of the Mobiles, still less of the National Guard, know their duty; as it is, I will devote myself to your corps till they march. In the first place, how strong do you mean them to be?"

"One strong company, say 120 men," Captain Tempé answered. "More than that would be too unwieldy for

guerilla work, I would rather have twenty less than more ; indeed I should be quite satisfied with a hundred. If I find that volunteers come in in greater numbers than I can accept, I shall advise them to get up other similar corps. There ought to be scores of small parties, hanging upon the rear and flank of the enemy, and interrupting his communication."

"How do you think of arming them?"

"Either with chassepots or with your English rifles. It is of no use applying to Government, they will not be able to arm the Mobiles for months, to say nothing of the National Guard. We must buy the rifles in England or Belgium. It will be difficult to get chassepots, so I think the best plan will be to decide at once upon your Sniders."

"I know a gentleman who is connected with these matters in England, and will, if you like, send out an order at once, for say eleven dozen Sniders to be forwarded viâ Rouen, and thence by rail."

"I should be very glad if you would do so," Captain Tempé said. "I have no doubt about getting that number of recruits easily enough. I have had a good many calls already this morning, and several thousand francs of subscription have been promised. In another three or four days the money will be ready, so if you write to your friends to make an agreement with a manufacturer, I can give you the money by the time his answer arrives. When the guns arrive those who can pay for them will do so, and the rest will be paid for by the subscriptions. Of course we shall want them complete with bayonets. If at the same time you can order ammunition, say 200

rounds for each rifle, it would be perhaps a saving of time, as the Government may not be able to supply any at first. However, after the meeting this evening, I shall see how the subscriptions come in, and we can settle on these points to-morrow. The municipality will help, I have no doubt."

"What is your idea as to equipment, Tempé?"

"As light as possible. Nothing destroys the go of men more than to be obliged to carry heavy weights on their shoulders. We shall be essentially guerillas. Our attacks to be successful must be surprises. Speed, therefore, and the power to march long distances are the first of essentials. I do not propose to carry knapsacks, mere haversacks, bags capable of containing a spare shirt, a couple of pairs of socks, and three days' biscuits. Each man must also carry a spare pair of boots strapped to his belt behind. A thick blanket with a hole cut for the head, so as to make a cloak by day a cover by night, will be carried, rolled up over our shoulder like a scarf, and each man should carry a light waterproof coat. I do not propose to take even tents *d'abri*. They add considerably to the weight, and unless when we are actually engaged in expeditions, we shall make our head-quarters at some village, when the men can be dispersed among the cottages, or sleep in stables or barns. When on expeditions they must sleep in the open air."

"I quite approve of your plan," Captain Barclay said. "Exclusive of his rifle and ammunition the weight need not be above fifteen pounds a man, and with this they ought to be able to march and fight with comfort. The way your soldiers march out, laden like beasts of burden, is

absurd. It is impossible for men either to march or fight with a heavy load upon their backs."

"Have you thought about uniform?"

"No, I have not settled at all; I thought of letting the men fix upon one of their own choice."

"Do nothing of the sort," Captain Barclay said. "The men will only think of what is most becoming or picturesque. You cannot do better than fix upon some good, serviceable uniform of a dark-greish colour, something similar to that of some of our English Volunteer Corps. I will give you a drawing of it. Let the tunics be made of a thick and good cloth, let the men have short trousers, or, as we call them, knickerbockers, with leather gaiters and lace boots, the shoes of your soldier are altogether a mistake. I will bring you a sketch tomorrow, and you will see that it is neat as well as serviceable."

"Thank you. By the way, I suppose that you have no objection to my mentioning at the meeting this evening that your sons have joined. If there should be any inclination to hang back, which I hope there will not be, the fact that your boys have joined may decide many who would otherwise hesitate."

"Certainly. I will not detain you longer at present. I shall see you in a day or two, and any assistance which I can give is at your service."

"Thanks very much. I only wish that you could go with us. Good-bye. Tell the boys that their names are down, and that we shall begin drill in a day or two."



CHAPTER III.

DEATH TO THE SPY!

THE next morning Madame Duburg arrived at ten o'clock, an hour at which she had never, as far as Mrs. Barclay knew, turned out of her house since her marriage. She was actually walking fast too; it was evident that something serious was the matter.

Mrs. Barclay was in the garden, and her visitor came straight out from the house to her.

"Is any thing the matter?" was Mrs. Barclay's first question.

"Yes, a great deal is the matter," Madame Duburg began vehemently. "You and your English husband are mad, your wretched boys are mad. They have made my sons mad also, and, my faith, I believe that my husband will catch it. It is enough to make me also mad."

Notwithstanding the trouble in which Mrs. Barclay was at the resolution of her sons, she could scarcely help

smiling at the excitement of Madame Duburg, the cause of which she at once guessed. However, she asked with an air of astonishment, "My dear sister-in-law, what can you be talking about?"

"I know what I say," Madame Duburg continued; "I always said that you were mad, you and your husband, to let your boys go about and play and tear and bruise themselves like wild Indians. I always knew that harm would come of it, when I saw my boys come in hot, oh, so unpleasantly hot to look at, but I did not think of such harm as this, my faith, it is incredible. When I heard that you were to marry yourself to an Englishman, I said at once, it is bad, harm will come of it. These English are Islanders, they are eccentric, they are mad. They sell their wives in the market with a cord round their necks."

"My dear sister-in-law," Mrs. Barclay interrupted, "I have so often assured you that that absurd statement was entirely false, and due only to the absolute ignorance of our nation of every thing outside itself."

"I have heard it often," Madame Duburg went on positively, "they are a nation of singularities. I doubt not that it is true; he has hidden the truth from you. True or false I care not. They are mad. For this I care not. My faith, I have not married an Englishman. Why, then, should I care for the madness of this nation of Islanders? This I said when I heard that you were to marry an Englishman. Could I imagine that I also was to become a victim? Could I suppose that my husband, a man sensible in most things, would also become mad; that my boys would grow up like young savages, and

would offer themselves to go out to sleep without beds, to catch colds, to have red noses and coughs, perhaps even, my faith, to be killed by the balls of German pigs? My word of honour, I ask myself, am I living in France, am I asleep, am I dreaming, am I too mad? I said to myself, I shall go to my sister-in-law, and I will demand of her, is it possible that these things are true?"

"If you mean by all this, sister-in-law, is it true that I have consented to my boys going out to fight for France, it is quite true," Mrs. Barclay said quietly.

Madame Duburg sat down upon a garden seat, raised her hands, and nodded her head slowly and solemnly, "She says it is true, she actually says that it is true."

"Why should they not go?" Mrs. Barclay continued quietly. "They are strong enough to carry arms, and why should they not go out to defend their country? In a short time it is likely that every one who can carry arms will have to go. I shall miss them sorely, it is a terrible trial; but other women have to see their sons go out, why should not I?"

"Because there is no occasion for it at all," Madame Duburg said angrily; "because they are boys and not men, because their father is English; and stupid men like my husband will say, if these young English boys go it will be a shame upon us for our own to remain behind. What, I ask you, is the use of being well off, what is the use of paying taxes for an army, if our boys must fight? It is absurd, it is against reason, it is atrocious."

Mrs. Duburg's anger and remonstrance were alike lost upon Mrs. Barclay, and she cut her visitor short. "My dear sister-in-law, it is of no use our arguing or talking

I consider, rightly or wrongly, that the claims of our country stand before our private convenience or inconvenience. If I were a man, I should certainly go out to fight; why should not my boys do so if they choose? At any rate, I have given my consent, and it is too late to draw back, even if I wished to do so, which I say frankly that I do not."

Madame Duburg took her departure much offended, and late in the evening her husband came in, and had a long talk with Captain Barclay.

The following morning Louis and Philippe came in in a high state of delight to say that their father had that morning given his consent to their going. In three days after the opening of the list, a hundred and twenty men had inscribed their names, and Captain Tempé refused to admit more. Numbers were, he argued, a source of weakness rather than of strength when the men were almost entirely ignorant of drill. For sudden attacks, for night marches, for attacks upon convoys, number is less needed than dash and speed. Among large bodies discipline cannot be kept up except by immense severity upon the part of the officers, or by the existence of that feeling of discipline and obedience among the men, which is gained only by long custom to military habits. Besides which the difficulty of obtaining provisions for a large body of men would be enormous. Indeed Captain Tempé determined to organize even this small corps into four companies each of thirty men, to act under one head, and to join together upon all occasions of important expeditions, but at other times to be divided among villages at such distance as would enable them to watch

a large extent of country, each company sending out scouts and outposts in its own neighbourhood.

By far the larger proportion of those who joined were either proprietors, or the the sons of proprietors in and around Dijon. At that time government had made no arrangement whatever concerning franc-tireurs, and no pay was therefore available. The invitation was therefore specially to those willing and able to go out upon their own account, and at their own expense. Other recruits had been invited, but as these could join the regular forces and receive pay and other advantages, the number who sent in their names was small. The men who did so were for the most part picked men, foresters, wood-cutters, and others who preferred the certainty of active and stirring service among the franc-tireurs to the pay and comparative monotony of the regular service. There were some forty of these men among the corps, the rest being all able to provide at least their outfit. Subscriptions had come in rapidly, and in a week an ample sum was collected to arm and equip all those not able to do so for themselves, and to form a military chest sufficient to pay for the food of the whole corps in the field for some time.

When the list of volunteers was complete, a meeting was held at which for the first time the future comrades met.

Besides Ralph and Percy and their cousins there were six or eight others of their school friends, all lads of about sixteen. It was an important moment in their lives, when they then felt themselves, if not actually men, at least as going to do the work of men. Upon the

table in the room in which the meeting was held was a document which each in turn was to sign, and behind this Captain Tempé took his seat.

As many of those present knew each other, there was a considerable buzz and talk in the room until Captain Tempé tapped the table for silence, and then rose to speak.

"My friends," he began, "for I cannot call you comrades until you have formally entered your names, before you irrevocably commit yourselves to this affair, I wish you each to know exactly what it is that we are going to do. This will be no holiday expedition. I can promise all who go with me plenty of excitement and a great deal of fighting, but I can also promise them with equal certainty an immense deal of suffering, an amount of hardship and privation of which at present few here have any idea whatever. The winter is fast coming on, and winter in the Vosges mountains is no trifle. Let no one, then, put down his name here who is not prepared to suffer every hardship which it is well possible to suffer. As to the danger I say nothing. You are Frenchmen, and have come forward to die if needs be for your country." Here the speaker was interrupted by loud cheering and cries of "Vive la France." "Next, as to discipline. This is an extremely important point. In our absence from military stations, it is essential that we ourselves should keep and enforce the strictest discipline. I have this morning received from General Palikao, under whom I served for many years, an answer to an application I wrote to him a week since. He highly approves of my plan of cutting the roads behind the Prussians, and

only wishes that he had a hundred small corps out upon the same errand. He has already received other proposals of the same nature. He enclosed with his letter my formal appointment as Commandant of the Corps of Franc-Tireurs of Dijon, with full military authority and power." Great cheering again broke out. "This power, in case of need, I warn you that I shall use unhesitatingly. Discipline in a corps like ours is everything. There must be no murmuring under hardships, no hesitation in obeying any order, however unpleasant. Prompt, willing, cheerful obedience when at work, a warm friendship, and perfect good fellowship at other times: this is my programme." The speaker was again interrupted with hearty cheering. "I intend to divide the corps into four companies, each of thirty men. Each company will have an officer, and will at times act independently of each other. I have deliberated whether it is best to allow each company to choose its own officer, or whether to nominate them myself. I have determined to adopt the latter course. You can hardly be such good judges as to the qualities required by officers during an expedition like the present as I am; and as I know every man here, and as I shall have the opportunity of seeing more of each man during the three weeks which we shall spend here upon drill, I shall then choose an officer for each company, but I will leave it to each company to decide whether to accept my choice or not. There may be points in a man's character which may make him unpopular. Now as to drill. We have three weeks before us. Not long enough to make men good soldiers, but amply sufficient, with hard work, to make them good

skirmishers. I have already arranged with four men, who have served as non-commissioned officers in the army, one of whom will take each company. Captain Barclay, who is well known to most of you, has kindly offered to give musketry instruction for four hours each morning. Ten men of each company will go each morning for a week to drill at the range ; so that in three weeks each man will have had a week's instruction. The hours will be from seven to eleven. The others will drill during the same hours. All will drill together in the afternoon from three to six. The officer commanding the troops here has promised us the loan of a hundred and twenty old guns which are in store, and also of twenty Chassepots for rifle practice. That is all I have to say. All who are ready and willing to enter upon these terms can now sign their names ; those who are not perfectly sure of their own willingness can draw back before it is too late."

When the cheering ceased, each man came forward and signed his name.

"The first parade will take place at seven to-morrow morning in the Place d'Armes. A suit of uniform complete will be exhibited here at twelve o'clock. A man has offered to supply them at contract prices, but any who prefer it can have it made by their own tailor. Now, good night, boys. "Vive les Franc-Tireurs du Dijon !" "Vive la France !" and with a cheer the men separated."

The next morning the corps met, and were divided into companies. The division was alphabetical, and the young Barclays and Duburgs were all in the first company. This was a matter of great pleasure to them, as

they had been afraid that they might have been separated.

The following day drill began in earnest, and accustomed as the boys were to exercise, they found seven hours a day hard work of it. Still they felt it very much less than many of the young men who for years had done little but lounge in cafés or stroll at the promenade. All, however, stuck to their work, and as their hearts were in it, it was surprising how quickly they picked up the rudiments of drill. Fortunately, they were not required to learn anything beyond the management of their firearms, the simplest movements, and the duty of skirmishers, as all complicated manœuvres would have been useless in a small corps whose duties would be confined entirely to skirmishing. With this branch of their work Captain Tempé was determined that they should be thoroughly acquainted; and they were taught how to use cover of all kinds with advantage, how to defend a building, crenelate a wall, fell trees to form an obstacle across roads or a breastwork in front of them, and how to throw themselves into square rapidly to repel cavalry.

Captain Barclay was indefatigable as a musketry instructor, and with the aid of a few friends got up a subscription which was spent in a number of small prizes, so as to give the men as much interest as possible in their work. Captain Tempé impressed most strenuously upon the men the extreme importance of proficiency in shooting, as it was upon the accuracy and deadliness of their fire that they would have to rely to enable them to contend with superior forces in the combats they would have to go through, and each man would probably have

frequently to depend for his life upon the accuracy of his fire.

The original plan of instructing a third of the men each week in musketry was abandoned, and the parties were changed each day in order to enable all to advance at an equal rate. Besides, their ammunition was supplied, so that those who chose to do so could practise shooting for their own amusement between their morning and afternoon drill. The Barclays were constant in their attendance at the shooting ground, and the steady hand and eye which cricket, fencing, and other exercises had given them now stood them in good stead, for by the end of the time they became as good marksmen as any in the corps.

They still lived at home, as did all those members of the corps whose residences were in and around Dijon. For those who lived too far away to come in and out every day to drill, a large empty barn was taken, and fitted up as a temporary barracks.

The time did not pass away without great excitement, for as the end of August drew on every one was watching in deep anxiety for the news of a battle near Chalons, where MacMahon had been organizing a fresh army. Then came the news that the camp at Chalons was broken up, and that MacMahon was marching to the relief of Bazaine. Two or three days of anxious expectation followed, and then, on the 3rd of September, came the news, through Switzerland, of the utter defeat and surrender of the French army at Sedan. At first the news seemed too terrible to be true. People seemed stunned at the thought of a hundred thousand French-

men laying down their arms. Two days later came the news of the revolution in Paris. This excited various emotions among the people, but the prevailing idea seemed to be that, now there was a Republic, past disasters would be retrieved.

“What do you think of the news, Papa?” the boys asked, as, drill over, they hurried up to talk the matter over with their father.

“With any other people I should consider it to be the most unfortunate event which could have possibly occurred,” Captain Barclay said. “A change of Government, involving a change of officials throughout all the departments, and a perfect upset of the whole machinery of organization, appears little short of insanity. At the same time, it is possible that it may arouse such a burst of national enthusiasm that the resistance, which, as far as the civil population is concerned, has as yet been contemptible—in fact, has not been attempted at all—may become of so obstinate and desperate a character, that the Prussians may be fairly wearied out. There is scarcely any hope of future victories in the field. Raw levies, however plucky, can be no match for such troops as the Prussians in the open. The only hope is in masses of franc-tireurs upon the rear and flanks of the enemy. Every bridge, every wood, every village should be defended to the death. In this way the Prussians would only hold the ground they stand on, and it would be absolutely impossible for them to feed their immense armies, or to bring up their siege *matériel* against Paris. The spirit to do this may possibly be excited by the revolution; otherwise France is lost. Success alone can

excuse it, for a more senseless, more unjustifiable, more shameful revolution was in my mind never made. It has been effected purely by the radicals and roughs of Paris, the men who have for years been advocating a war with Prussia, and who a month ago were screaming 'To Berlin.' For these men to turn round upon the Emperor in his misfortune, and, without consulting the rest of France, to effect a revolution, is in my mind simply infamous. Even regarded as a matter of policy, it is bad in the extreme. Austria, Italy, and Russia, to say nothing of England, would sooner or later have interfered in favour of an established empire, but their sympathies will be chilled by this revolution. The democratic party in all these countries may exult, but the extreme democratic party do not hold the reins of power anywhere, and their monarchs will certainly not feel called upon to assist to establish a republic. Prussia herself, intensely aristocratic in her institutions, will probably refuse to treat altogether with the schemers who have seized the power, for the King of Prussia is perhaps the greatest hater of democracy in Europe. Still, boys, these changes make no difference in your duty. You are fighting for France, not for an empire or a republic; and as long as France resists, it is your duty to continue. In fact, it is now more than ever the duty of you and of every Frenchman to fight. Her army is entirely gone, and it is simply upon the pluck and energy of her population that she has to trust."

"Do you think Paris will hold out, Papa?"

"She is sure to do so, boys. She has made the revolution, and she is bound to defend it. I know Paris well.

The fortifications are far too strong to be taken by a sudden attack, and it will be a long time before the Prussians can bring up a siege train. Paris will only be starved out, and if her people are only half as brave as they are turbulent they ought to render it impossible for the Prussians to blockade such an immense circle. At any rate, France has two months, perhaps much longer, but two months ought to be quite enough, if her people have but spirit to surround the enemy, to cut off his supplies, and to force him to retreat."

The next morning, when the corps assembled for drill, Captain Tempé addressed them on the subject of the events in Paris. He told them that whether they approved or disapproved of what had taken place there, their duty as Frenchmen was plain. For the present they were not politicians but patriots, and he hoped that not a word of politics would be spoken in the corps, but that every one would give his whole thought, his whole strength, and, if must be, his life, in the cause of France. His address was greatly applauded, and gave immense satisfaction to the men, for already differences of opinion were becoming manifest among them. Some had exulted loudly at the downfall of Napoleon; others had said little, but their gloomy looks had testified sufficiently what were their opinions; while many among the gentlemen in the corps, especially those belonging to old families, were well known to be attached either to a Legitimist or Orleanist Prince. The proposal, therefore, that no politics should be discussed during the war, but that all should remember only that they were fighting for France, gave great satisfaction, and promised

a continuance of the good fellowship which had hitherto reigned in the corps.

It was a great day when, a fortnight from its first organization, the corps turned out for the first time in their uniforms. The band of the National Guards headed them as they marched down the high street of Dijon to the parade ground; and as the spectators cheered, the ladies waved their handkerchiefs, and the whole corps joined in cheers to the stirring notes of the Marseillaise, the young Barclays felt their cheeks flush, their hands tighten upon their rifles, and their hearts beat with a fierce longing to be face to face with the hated Prussians.

A day or two after this the Snider rifles ordered from England by Captain Barclay arrived, and although the men at first preferred the Chassepots, with which they were familiar, they were soon accustomed to the new weapons, and readily acknowledged the advantage which, as their commander pointed out to them, the dark-brown barrels possessed for skirmishers over the bright barrels of the Chassepots, which, with the sun shining upon them, would betray them to an enemy miles away.

A day or two afterwards, as Ralph and Percy were returning in the evening from drill, they heard a great tumult in the streets. They hurried forward to see what was the matter, and found an excited crowd shouting and gesticulating. "Death to the spy!" "Death to the spy!" "Hang him!" "Kill the dog!" were the shouts, and two gendarmes in the centre of the crowd were vainly trying to protect a man who was walking between them. He was a tall, powerful-looking man, but it was impossible to see what he was like, for the blood was

streaming down his forehead from a blow he had just received.

Just as the boys came up another blow from a stick fell on his head, and this served to rouse him to desperation, for he turned round, with one blow knocked down the fellow who had struck him, and then commenced a furious attack upon his persecutors. For a moment they drew back, and then closed upon him again. Blows from sticks and hands rained upon him, but he struggled desperately. At last, overwhelmed by numbers, he fell, and as he did so he raised a wild shout, "Hurroo for ould Ireland."

"He is an Englishman, Percy," Ralph exclaimed; "he is not a Prussian at all. Come on! Here, Louis, Philippe, help, they are killing an Englishman."

Followed by their cousins, who had just arrived at the spot, the boys made a rush through the crowd, and arrived in another moment by the prostrate man, whom his assailants were kicking savagely. The rush of the four boys, aided by the butt-end of their rifles, which they used freely on the ribs of those who stood in their way, cleared off the assailants for an instant, and the two gendarmes, who had been hustled away, drawing their swords, again took their place by the side of their insensible prisoner.

The mob had only recoiled for a moment, and now, furious at being balked of their expected prey, prepared to rush upon his defenders, shouting as they did so, "Death to the spy!" The moment's delay had, however, given time to the boys to fix bayonets.

"Keep off," Ralph shouted, "or we run you through! The man is not a spy, I tell you; he is an Englishman."



Rescue of a supposed Spy.—Page 48.

The noise was too great for the words to be heard, and with cries of "Death to the spy!" the men in front prepared for a rush.

The levelled bayonets and drawn swords, however, for a moment checked their ardour; but those behind kept up the cry, and a serious conflict would have ensued had not a party of five or six of the franc-tireurs came along at the moment. These seeing their comrades standing with levelled bayonets keeping the mob at bay, without asking any questions, at once burst their way through to their side, distributing blows right and left heartily with the butt-end of their rifles. This reinforcement put an end to the threatened conflict, and the gendarmes, aided by two of the franc-tireurs, lifted the insensible man, and carried him to the Mairie, the rest of the franc-tireurs marching on either side as a guard, and the yelling crowd following them.

Once inside the Mairie, the gates were shut, and the supposed spy being laid down on the bench, cold water was dashed in his face, and in a few minutes he opened his eyes.

"The murdering villains!" he muttered to himself. "They've kilt me entirely, bad luck to them! A hundred to one, the cowardly blackguards! Where am I?" and he made an effort to rise.

"You're all right," Ralph said. "You're with friends. Don't be afraid, you're safe now."

"Jabers!" exclaimed the Irishman, in astonishment, sitting up and looking round him, "here's a little French soldier speaking as illegant English as I do meself."

"I'm English," laughed Ralph, "and luckily it was for

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you that we came along. We heard you call out just as you fell, and got in in time, with the help of our friends, to save your life. Another minute or two and we should have been too late."

"God bless your honour!" the man, who had now thoroughly recovered himself, said earnestly. "And it was a tight shave entirely. You've saved Tim Doyle's life, and your honour shall see that he's not ungrateful. Whenever you want a lad with a strong arm and a thick stick, Tim's the boy."

"Thank you, Tim," Ralph said, heartily. "Now you had better let the surgeon look at your head; you have got some nasty cuts."

"Sure, and my head's all right, your honour. It isn't a tap from a Frenchman that would break the skull of Tim Doyle."

The gendarmes now intimated that as the prisoner was restored he must go in at once before the maire. The young Barclays accompanied him, and acted as interpreters at the examination. The story was a simple one, and the passport and other papers upon the Irishman proved its truth conclusively.

Tim was an Irishman, who had come out as groom with an English gentleman. His master had fallen ill at Lyons, had parted with his horses and carriage, and returned to England. Tim had accepted the offer of the horse dealer who had purchased the horses to remain in his service, and had been with him six months when the war broke out. He had picked up a little French, but had been several times arrested in Lyons as a spy, and his master had at last told him that it was not safe for

him to remain, and that he had better return to England. He had reached Dijon on that morning, but the train, instead of going on, had been stopped, as large numbers of mobiles were leaving for Paris, and the ordinary traffic was suspended. Tim had therefore passed the day strolling about Dijon. The hour had approached at which he had been told that a train might leave, and Tim had asked a passer-by the way to the station. His broken French at once aroused suspicion. A crowd collected in a few minutes, and Tim was in the first place saved from being attacked by the arrival of two gendarmes upon the scene. He had at once told them that he was English, and had produced his passport, and they had decided upon taking him to the maire for the examination of his papers, but on the way the crowd, increased by fresh arrivals, had determined to take the law into their own hands, and only the arrival of the young Barclays and their cousins had saved his life.

The maire saw at once, upon examination of the papers, that the story was correct, and pronounced that Tim was at liberty to go where he pleased.

The poor fellow, however, though he made light of his wounds and bruises, was much shaken, and it would, moreover, have been dangerous for him to venture again into the streets of Dijon. Ralph therefore at once offered to take him out and to give him a night's shelter, an offer which the Irishman accepted with many thanks.

It was now getting dark, and, accompanied by their cousins, the Barclays were let out with Tim Doyle from a back entrance to the mairie, and made their way un-

noticed through the town, and arrived half an hour later at home.

Captain and Mrs. Barclay, upon hearing the story, cordially approved of what the boys had done ; and Captain Barclay having, in spite of Tim's earnest remonstrance that it was of no consequence in the world, put some wet rags upon the most serious of the wounds, bandaged up his head, and sent him at once to bed.

In the morning, when the lads started for drill, the Irishman was still in bed ; but when they returned to dinner, they found him working in the garden as vigorously as if the events of the previous day had been a mere dream.

When he saw them coming he stuck his spade into the ground, and went forward to meet them. "God bless your honours, but I'm glad to see you again, and to thank you for saving my life, which them bastes had made up their minds they were going to have. I ain't good at talking, your honours, but if it's the last drop of my blood that would be of any use to you, you'd be heartily welcome to it."

"I am very glad we arrived in time, Tim," Ralph said. "And it's lucky for you that you shouted 'Hurrah for Old Ireland !' as you went down, for of course we had no idea you were a countryman, and although we were disgusted at the brutality of that cowardly mob, we could hardly have interfered between them and a German spy. What are you thinking of doing now? It will hardly be safe for you to travel through France while this madness about spies lasts, for with your broken French you would be getting taken up continually."

"I'm not thinking of it at all, your honour," the Irish-

man said. "The master has been telling me that your honours are starting for the war, and so I've made up my mind that I shall go along wid ye."

The boys laughed. "You are not in earnest, Tim?"

"As sure as the Gospels, your honour. I've served five years in the Cork Militia, and wore the badge as a marksman; and so I mean to 'list, and go as your honours' sarvint."

"But you can't do that, Tim, even if we would let you," Ralph laughed. "There won't be any servants at all."

"Sure, your honour is mistaken entirely," Tim said gravely. "In the sarvice a soldier is always told off as a servant for each officer."

"But we are not going as officers, Tim," Percy said; "we are going as simple soldiers."

"What! going as privates?" Tim Doyle said in astonishment. "Does your honour mane to say that you are going to shoulder a firelock and just go as privates?"

"That's it, Tim. You see this is not a regular regiment; it is a corps of irregulars, and more than half the privates are gentlemen."

"Holy Mother!" ejaculated Tim, in astonishment; "did one ever hear of the like?" Then, after a pause, "Then your honour will want a sarvint more than iver. Who is to clean your boots, and to pipeclay your belts, to wash your linen, to clean your firelock, and cook your dinners, and pitch your tent, if you don't have a sarvint? The thing's against nature entirely."

"We shall do it all ourselves, Tim—that is to say, as far as cleaning the rifles, washing our linen, and cooking the dinner: as for the other things, I don't suppose we

shall ever have our boots cleaned, we have no white belts to pipeclay, for they are made of buff leather, and we shall not have to pitch tents, for we don't take them with us, but shall, when necessary, sleep in the open air."

Tim was too surprised to speak for a time ; at last he said doggedly, " Sarvint or no sarvint, your honour, it is evident that it's rough times you're going to have, and Tim Doyle will be there with you as sure as the piper."

" We should like you with us very much, Tim, if you make up your mind to go," Ralph said, " but the corps is quite full. We have refused dozens of recruits."

Tim looked downcast ; at last he said, " Well, your honour, it may be that they won't have me as a soldier, but I'll go sure enough, if I die for it. There's no law to punish a man for walking after a regiment of soldiers, and wherever your regiment goes, sure enough I'll tramp after ye. There's many an odd way I might make myself useful, and they'll soon get used to see me about, and let me come and go into the camp."

No persuasion could alter Tim's determination, and as they felt that having so attached a fellow near them might be of real utility and comfort, when the boys went down in the afternoon they spoke to Captain Tempé about it. At first he said that it was impossible, as he had already refused so many offers of service ; but upon hearing all the story and thinking the matter over, he said suddenly, " By-the-bye, there is a way by which he might go with us. You know I have ordered a light two-wheel cart, built very strong, for the mountains, to carry our spare ammunition, powder for blowing up bridges, cooking-pots, and stores. I have not engaged a driver as yet ; if your

Irishman, who you say understands horses, likes to go as a driver to begin with, I will promise him the first vacant rifle. I fear that he will not have long to wait after we once get near the enemy, and as he has already served, you say, he will be better than a new recruit, and we can get a countryman to take his place with the cart."

Upon their return in the evening with the news, Tim Doyle's joy knew no bound, and he whooped and shouted till Milly laughed so that she had to beg of him to stop.

The next day Tim went down with Captain Barclay and signed the engagement. He remained with the Captain during the time that the latter was giving his instructions in musketry, entering upon his duties in connexion with the corps by going down to the butts and acting as marker, and then returned with him to the cottage, as it was agreed that he had better remain there quietly until the corps was ready to march, as, if he were to venture alone in the town, he might at any time be subject to a repetition of the attack upon the day of his arrival. At the cottage he soon became a general favourite. His desire to make himself useful in any way, his fund of fun and good temper, pleased every one, even Marie and Jeannette, the two servants, who could not understand a word of what he said, were in a constant broad grin at the pantomime by which he endeavoured to eke out his few words of French. Milly became quite attached to him, and Captain and Mrs. Barclay both felt cheered and comforted at the thought that this devoted fellow would be at hand to look after and assist the boys in time of danger, suffering, or sickness.



CHAPTER IV.

STARTING FOR THE VOSGES.

THE day for the departure of the corps was near at hand. The party at the Barclays were all filled with sadness at the thoughts of separation, but all strove to hide their feelings for the sake of the others. Captain and Mrs. Barclay were anxious that the boys should leave in good spirits and high hope, while the boys wished to keep up an appearance of merely going upon an ordinary excursion, in order to cheer their parents.

The day before starting the whole corps marched to the cathedral, where mass was celebrated, a sermon preached, and a blessing solemnly prayed for for them.

The boys had asked their father if he had any objection to their taking part in this ceremonial in a Roman Catholic church, but Captain Barclay had at once said that, upon the contrary, he should wish them to do so. Protestants might not approve of many things in the Catholic Church, but that could be no reason whatever

against a Protestant taking part in a solemn prayer to God wherever that prayer might be offered up.

The young Duburgs were unaffectedly glad that the time for their departure had come, for the month that had passed had been a most unpleasant one to them. Their mother had in vain tried to persuade them to stay, first by entreaty, and then by anger, and finding these means fail, she had passed her time either in sullen silence, or in remaining in bed, declaring that her nerves were utterly shattered, and that she should never survive it. She had refused to see Mrs. Barclay, when the latter called a day or two after their visit to the cottage, and she had not been near her since.

Julie and Justine were forbidden to go in to see Milly, and altogether there was quite an estrangement between the two families. The boys, however, were of course constantly together ; and M. Duburg came in, as usual, every day or two for a chat with Captain Barclay.

September the fifteenth, the day of separation, arrived. They were to march at eight in the morning, and left home, therefore, at seven. This was so far fortunate that it left less time for the painful adieus. Captain Barclay had a long talk with the boys the night before, repeating all the hints and instructions which he had before given them.

It is not necessary to describe the parting. Every one of my readers can imagine for themselves how sad was the scene. How Milly sobbed aloud in spite of her efforts, how Mrs. Barclay kissed her boys, and then ran up to her own room to cry alone ; how their father wrung their hands, and, after giving them his blessing, turned hastily away that they might not see the tears which he

could not keep back ; and how the boys, in spite of their uniform and their dignity as soldiers, cried too. Tim Doyle had gone on an hour before, taking their blankets, so they had nothing to do but to snatch up their guns and hasten away, half-blinded with tears, towards the town. They reached it just as the bugle sounded the assembly.

By this time they had steadied themselves, and in the work of preparing for the start soon lost all feeling of despondency.

It would be difficult to find a more workmanlike little corps than the franc-tireurs of Dijon, as, with the band of the National Guard at their head, playing the Marseillaise, they marched through the old city. Their uniform was a brownish-grey ; their blankets, rolled up tight, and carried like a scarf over one shoulder and under the other arm, were brown also. Their belts and gaiters were of buff leather. Their caps had flat peaks, to shade their eyes, but round the cap was rolled a flap lined with fur, which let down over the ears and back of the neck, tying under the chin : on the outer side of the fur was thin india-rubber to throw the rain off down over the light waterproof cloaks, which each man carried in a small case slung to his belt. The waterproof on the caps, when rolled up, did not show, the caps then looking like fur caps with a peak.

Slung over the shoulder on the opposite side to the blanket was a havresack, or stout canvas bag, brown like the rest of the equipments. Each bag was divided into two compartments, the larger one holding a spare shirt, a few pairs of socks and handkerchiefs, a comb, and other

small necessaries. In the other, bread, biscuits, or other provisions could be carried. Each man had also a watter-bottle slung over his shoulder.

On either side of the ammunition pouch behind was strapped a new boot, so placed that it in no way interfered with the bearer getting at the pouch. Next was fastened the tin box, the lid of which forms a plate, the bottom a saucepan or frying-pan. On one side hung the bayonet, upon the other a hatchet, a pick, or a short-handled shovel, each company having ten of each implement.

It will be judged that this was a heavy load, but the articles were all necessaries, and the weight over and above the rifle and ammunition was not, even including the pick or shovel, more than half that ordinarily carried by a French soldier.

At the head of the corps marched its commandant. The French term commandant answers to an English major, and he will therefore in future be termed Major Tempé. Each of the four companies was also headed by its officer. Major Tempé had chosen for these posts four men who, like himself, had served—three in the army, and one in the navy. He had written to them as soon as the corps was organized, and they had arrived ten days before the start. One or two only of the franc-tireurs, who had entertained a hope of being made officers, were at first a little discontented; but as it was evidently vastly to the advantage of the corps to have experienced officers, the appointments gave great satisfaction to the rest of the men. Fortunately, there were in the ranks several men who had served as privates

or non-commissioned officers, and from these Major Tempé selected a sergeant and a corporal for each company.

Behind the corps followed the cart loaded with the stores of the corps, a considerable amount of ammunition, two or three cases of gun-cotton for blowing up bridges, several small barrels of powder, a large quantity of fine iron wire, three or four crowbars, bags of coffee and rice, and a keg of brandy, four kettles and as many large saucepans, together with all sorts of odds and ends. By the side of the horse walked Tim Doyle, dressed in the uniform of the corps, but without the equipments, and with a long blouse worn over his tunic. He was, in fact, already enrolled as an active member of the corps. This was done in the first place at his own earnest request, and upon the plea that thus only could he escape the chance of being seized as a spy whenever he might for a moment be separated from the corps, and also that unless he had a uniform like the rest, how could he take any vacancy in the ranks even when it should occur? Major Tempé, in exceeding the 120 determined upon, was influenced partly by these arguments, but more by the fact that difficulties would arise about food, cooking, and various other points, if the driver were not upon the same footing as the rest of the corps.

The march was not a long one—only to the railway station. A few carriages, with a truck for the cart, and a horse-box, were drawn up alongside the platform in readiness, and in ten minutes more all were in their places, the carriages attached to the ordinary train, and amidst great cheering and waving of handkerchiefs and

hats from hundreds of people collected in the station to see them off, they started for the Vosges.

Railway travelling, at no time rapid, was extremely slow at this period, and it was evening before they arrived at Epinal, where they were to pass the night. The journey, shortened by innumerable songs and choruses, had scarcely seemed long. The railway ran throughout its whole distance through pretty undulating country; indeed, towards the end of their journey, when they were fairly among the Vosges, the scenery became wild and savage. At Vesoul, which was about half way, the train had stopped for two hours, and here wine, bread and cheese, cold sausages, and fruits were distributed to the men by the inhabitants, who were assembled in large numbers at the station, and gave the corps an enthusiastic reception. They were the first band of franc-tireurs who had passed through, and the inhabitants regarded them as protectors against the wandering Uhlans, whose fame, although as yet far off, had caused them to be regarded with an almost superstitious fear.

At Epinal a similar and even warmer greeting awaited them; Epinal being so much nearer to the enemy that the fear of Uhlans was more acute. The station was decorated with green boughs, and the maire, with many of the leading inhabitants, were at the station to receive them. The corps formed upon the platform, and then marched through the little town to the Hôtel de Ville, loudly cheered by the people as they passed along. Here they were dismissed, with the order to parade again at half-past four in the morning.

There was no trouble as to billets for the night, as the

maire had already made out a list of the inhabitants who had offered accommodation, the number being greatly in excess of the strength of the corps. These persons now came forward, and each took off the number of franc-tireurs who had been allotted to them.

The sergeant of the first company, knowing the relationship and friendship of the young Barclays and Duburgs had promised them that, when practicable, he would always quarter them together. Upon the present occasion, the four were handed over to a gentleman, whose house was a short distance outside the town. Upon the way he chatted to them on the proposed course of the corps, upon its organization and discipline, and they asked for the first time the question which was so often in future to be upon their lips, "Had he any news of the enemy?"

The answer was that none as yet had come south of Luneville, and that indeed at present they were too much occupied at Metz and Strasburg to be able to detach any formidable parties. Small bodies of Uhlans occasionally had made raids, and driven in sheep and cattle, but they had not ventured to trust themselves very far into the mountains.

Upon arriving at the residence of their host, they were most kindly received by his wife and daughter, who, however, could not refrain from expressing their surprise at the youthfulness of their guests.

"But these are mere boys!" the lady said to her husband in German; "are all the franc-tireurs like these?"

"Oh, no," her husband said in the same language; "the greater part are sturdy fellows; but as they marched

by I observed some twelve or fourteen who were scarcely out of their boyhood. It is cruelty to send such youngsters out as these ; what can they do against these Prussians, who have beaten our best soldiers?"

"Fortunately," Ralph said in German, which he spoke fluently, as has already been stated, and with a merry laugh, which showed that he was not offended at the remark—"fortunately, fighting now is not an affair of spears and battle-axes. Age has nothing to do with shooting ; and as for fatigue, we shall not be the first in the corps to give up."

"I must really apologize very much, but I had no idea that you understood German, or I should not have made any remarks," the lady said smiling ; "but so few French boys out of Alsace do understand it that it never struck me that you spoke the language. You will find it an immense advantage, for outside the towns you will scarcely meet a person understanding French. But I am sure you must be all very hungry, and supper is quite ready."

They were soon seated at a well-spread table, waited upon by the daughter of the family, while their host and hostess sat and chatted with them as to their corps while the meal went on.

"Excuse another remark upon your personal appearance," the lady said, smiling, "but two of you look more like Alsacians than French. You have the fair complexion and brown wavy hair. You do not look like Frenchmen."

"Nor are we," Ralph laughed. "My brother and myself, although French born, are actually English. Our

father is an English officer, but our mother is French, and, as you see, we take after him rather than her."

"But I wonder that, as your father is English, he lets you go out upon this expedition, which is very perilous."

"We wished to go—that is, we thought it was our duty," Ralph said; "and although they were very sad at our leaving, they both agreed with us."

"I wish all Frenchmen were animated by the same feeling," said their host warmly. "Your gallant example should shame hundreds of thousands of loiterers and skulkers. You speak French perfectly; I should have had no idea that you were anything but French, or rather, from the way you speak German, that you were Alsatian."

"We have lived in France all our lives, except for two years which we passed in Germany, and two years at one time, together with one or two shorter visits, in England."

"And do you speak English as well as French?"

"Oh, yes, we always speak English at home. Our father made a rule that we should always do so, as he said it would be an immense disadvantage to us when we returned to England if we had the slightest French accent. Our mother now speaks English as purely and correctly as our father."

"Are your friends any relations of yours?"

"They are our cousins," Ralph said; "their father is our mother's brother."

For some time longer they chatted, and then their host said, "It is half-past nine, and we are early people here. You will have to be up by five, so I think that it is time you were off to bed. We shall scarcely be up when you start, but you will find a spirit-lamp on the

table, with coffee which only requires heating, together with some bread and butter. You will have some miles to march before you breakfast. And now you must all promise me that if you come to this place again you will come straight up here and look upon it as your home. If you get ill or wounded, which I hope will not happen, you will of course go home: but something may occur not sufficiently important for you to leave the corps, but which could be set straight by a few days' nursing and rest. In that case, you will come to us, will you not?"

The boys all gratefully promised to avail themselves of the invitation in case of need, and then said good night and good-bye to their host, and went off to the room prepared for them.

In the morning they were up in good time, dressed as quietly as they could, so as not to disturb their host, and went down stairs, lit the spirit-lamp under a glass bowl full of coffee and milk, and in ten minutes were on their way towards the town.

"We shall be lucky if we are often as comfortable as that," Percy said, looking back, and there was a general assent.

"There goes the bugle," Louis Duburg said; "we have a quarter of an hour yet. What pretty girls those were!"

Louis was nearly seventeen, and at seventeen a French lad considers himself a competent judge as to the appearance and manners of young ladies.

"Were they?" Percy said carelessly, with the indifference of an English boy of his age as to girls. "I did not notice it. I don't care for girls; they are always thinking

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about their dress, and one is afraid of touching them, in case you should spoil something. There is nothing jolly about them."

The others laughed. "I am sure Milly is jolly enough," Philip Duburg said.

"Yes, Milly is jolly," Percy answered. "You see, she has been with us boys, and she can play, and doesn't screech if you touch her, or mind a bit if she tears her frock. So are our cousins in England, some of them. Yes, there are some jolly girls, of course; still, after all, what's the good of them, taking them altogether? They are very nice in their way, quiet and well-behaved, and so on, but they are better indoors than out."

The clock was just striking half-past five as the boys reached the place of assembly. Most of the men were already upon the spot, and the bugler was blowing lustily. In another five minutes all were assembled, including Tim Doyle with his horse and cart.

"Good morning, Tim," the boys said, as they came up to him. "I hope you had as comfortable quarters as we had last night."

"Splendid, your honour—downright splendid: a supper fit for a lord, and a bed big enough for a duchess."

The boys laughed at the idea of a duchess wanting a bed bigger than any one else, and Tim went on, "Ah, your honour, if campaigning was all like this, sure I'd campaign all my life, and thank you; but it's many a time I shall look back upon my big supper and big bed. Not that I should like it altogether entirely: I should get so fat and so lazy that I shouldn't know my own shadow."

And now the bugle sounded again, and the men fell in. As they started they struck up a lively marching song, and several windows opened and adieus were waved to them as they passed down the street into the open country. Every one was in high spirits; the weather, which had for some time been unfavourable, had cleared up; the sun was rising brightly, and they felt that they had fairly started for work. The road was rough, the country wild and mountainous, thick forests extended in every direction as far as the eye could carry.

"There is one comfort, Percy," Ralph said, "if we are beaten and driven back, we might get into this forest and laugh at the Prussians."

Percy cast rather a doubtful eye at the dark woods. "The Prussians might not be able to discover us, Ralph, but I would as leave be killed by Prussian balls as die of hunger, and our chances of getting food there for a hundred men would be very slight."

"They don't look hospitable, certainly, Percy, I agree with you: we had better keep in the open country as long as possible."

The first village at which they arrived was Deyvilliers. Here a halt was called for ten minutes, five miles having already been marched. Many of the men, less fortunate than the Barclays and Duburgs, had had nothing to eat upon starting, and when the arms were piled there was a general dispersal through the village in search of provisions. Bread had been bought over night at Epinal and brought on in the cart, which was fortunate, for the village was a very small one, and there would have been a difficulty in obtaining more than a loaf or two; cheese and

fruit were in abundance, and the boys bought some apples, and sat down by the little feeder of the Moselle which passes through the village, and watched it tumbling past on its way to join the main stream a few miles below Epinal.

In a quarter of an hour they were again on the march. In another five miles they reached Fontaine, lying a little off the road to their right. They had now marched ten miles, and Major Tempé ordered a halt for three hours. A piece of level ground was chosen, arms were piled, blankets and havresacks taken off, and then preparations began for their first meal.

Men were sent off with kettles for water, others went up to the village with cans for wine, or beer, for in Alsace beer is more common than wine. Tim took the horse out of the shafts, and gave him some oats; some of the men were sent from each company to fetch wood, and the old soldiers prepared for the important operation of cooking. Several little fire-places were made with stones and turf, open on the side facing the wind. In these sticks were placed, and when they were fairly alight the saucepans, each holding the allowance of ten men, were placed on them. In these the meat, cut up in pieces of about half a pound, was placed, with pepper, salt, onions, rice, and potatoes peeled and cut up, and the whole filled up with water.

When the preparations were finished, the men threw themselves down under the shade of some trees, and smoked and chatted until, in about an hour, the cooking was complete. Each man then brought up his tin canteen, and received his portion of soup in the deep side, and his meat and vegetables in the shallow can. The bread

had already been cut up. The tin drinking-pots, which, with knives, forks, and spoons, were carried in the canteens, were filled with beer, and with much laughing and fun each man sat down on the grass or scattered rocks to eat his breakfast.

Many of the villagers had come down, and these brought, for the most part, little presents : a few apples, a little fresh cheese, or a bunch of grapes. It was a merry meal, and the boys agreed that it was the jolliest pic-nic that they had ever been at.

At two o'clock the bugle sounded ; the cooking things were packed up and placed in the cart again, the blankets and havresacks slung on, and the rifles shouldered, and with many a good wish from the peasants they marched forward again.

Eight miles farther marching brought them to the end of their day's journey, the village of Destord. It was a tiny place, with scarcely over a half-dozen houses. Major Tempé in consequence determined, as the weather was fine, upon bivouacking in the open air. For a time all were busy collecting wood. A sheltered place was chosen, for the village lay very high, close to the source of a little stream running into the river Mortagne.

The cooking places were again prepared for supper. At seven o'clock the meal was served, differing but little from that of the morning, except that after the men had eaten the soup, and the meat from it (in France called *bouilli*), they fried some thin slices of meat in the lids of their canteens, and concluded the meal with a cup of coffee.

Then four large fires were lit, one for each company,

and a smaller one for the officers. Blankets were spread out on the ground round these fires, and the men lit their pipes and chatted gaily. All were more or less tired, for although their month's hard drill had accustomed them to work, eighteen miles with arms, ammunition, and accoutrements, had tired them more than they had anticipated.

As this was their first night out, Major Tempé told them that he should not place a regular *cordon* of sentries, but that in future he should do so, whether they were near the enemy or not. By nine o'clock the fires began to burn low, the talking gradually ceased, and the men, rolling themselves up in their blankets, and putting their havresacks under their heads for pillows, soon dropped off to sleep, a solitary sentry keeping guard against pilferers.

A short march of ten miles took them next day to Rambervillers, where they were billeted among the inhabitants; and fourteen miles on the day after to Baccarat, on the river Meurthe, where they also obtained quarters. They were now approaching the neighbourhood of the enemy, and Major Tempé advised a halt for the next day, in order that he might make inquiries and investigate thoroughly the best route to be pursued.



CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST ENGAGEMENT.

THE news which the commandant of the franc-tireurs heard at Baccarat determined him to change his intentions, and to push on without delay to Halloville, a tiny hamlet on the lower spurs of the Vosges, some four miles from Blamont, and overlooking the valley of the Vexouse in which the latter town was situated.

It was a long march, and the weather had again changed, the rain descending all day in a steady pour. The men in their light waterproof cloaks and the flaps of their forage caps down, plodded steadily on, their spirit sustained by the thought that ere another twenty-four hours they might be in action. The news which hurried them forwards, had been to the effect that a body of two hundred Uhlans had left Sarrebourg and were advancing towards Blamont. They were going quietly, stopping to levy contributions at the village on the way. It was probable that they would enter Blamont on the same evening

that the franc-tireurs reached Halloville. It was supposed that they would proceed with the sheep and cattle that they had swept up by the valley of the Vexouse to Luneville.

To within four miles of Halloville the road had been a fair one, but it was here necessary to turn off by a track that was little better than a goat path. In vain a dozen of the men were told off to help with the cart, in vain they pushed behind, and shoved at the spokes of the wheels. The road was altogether impracticable. At last the horse and cart were taken aside into a thick wood and left there with Tim Doyle, a corporal and six of the men who were the most footsore and incapable of pushing on. Tim was dreadfully disgusted at being thus cut off from the chance of seeing and joining in any fighting, and only consoled himself with the hope that a vacancy would be likely to occur the next day, and that he would then be able to exchange his whip for a rifle.

The rest of the corps plodded on until, long after dusk, they arrived at the half dozen houses which form the village of Halloville. Their appearance as they marched up to it was greeted by a scream from a woman, followed by a perfect chorus of screams and cries. Men, women, and children were seen rushing out of the houses and taking to flight, and it was with the greatest difficulty that they were made to understand the truth that the formidable body which had so suddenly dropped upon them was not composed of the dreaded invaders.

When the truth was known they did the best to receive them hospitably; their means however were small, their houses equally so. However, in a short time blazing fires

were lighted on the hearths, blankets having been put up before the windows to prevent any light being visible from the valley. A fire was allotted for the cooking of each company, and preparations for supper were soon commenced. Then an examination was made of the facilities in the way of sleeping, and two barns were found well provided with straw. This was shaken out, and after eating their suppers the men packed close together upon the straw, and soon forgot both damp and fatigue, numerous sentries being thrown out in various directions to prevent the possibility of surprise, for the peasant had informed them that the information which they had received was correct, and that the Uhlans, about two hundred strong, had entered Blamont that afternoon, and had laid a requisition of twenty thousand francs upon the inhabitants, besides a considerable amount of stores of all sorts. At three o'clock they were roused, and found to their great pleasure that the rain had ceased. Guided by one of the villagers they made their way down to a point where the wood approached quite close to the road, at a narrow point of the valley.

Here Major Tempé posted his men along in the wood.

Several coils of wire had been brought with them, and these were now stretched tightly from tree to tree at a distance of about eighteen inches from the ground. Some forty yards farther back, young trees were felled and branches cut, and these were laid with the bushy parts towards the road, wires being twisted here and there among them so as to form abattis perfectly impenetrable for horsemen and difficult in the extreme for infantry. All worked hard, and by eight o'clock in the morning every thing

was in readiness. A small party had been left upon the high ground near Halloville, and one of them had brought down news every half-hour. Soon after daybreak a party of Uhlans had been seen to leave Blamont and to visit Barbas and Harboise, two villages in the flat of Blamont, and then to retire driving some cattle and sheep before them. At ten o'clock the rest of the men from Halloville came down with the news that the Uhlans, about 200 strong, had just left Blamont and were coming down the valley.

Each man now took the station allotted to him. Thirty men behind the trees next to the road, the main body being stationed behind the abattis, each man having previously settled upon a spot where he could fire through the leaves, which entirely concealed them from view from the road. Number 1 company was placed to the right, and consequently near to Blamont. Ralph and Percy were both in the front line behind the trees. Not a shot was to be fired on any consideration until Major Tempé gave the word. The men behind the trees were all ordered to lie down among the low undergrowth and brushwood. The line extended nearly a hundred yards. The water-proofs, blankets, and all other impediments had been left behind at Halloville, so that the men had the free use of their arms.

The rifles were loaded, the pouches shifted round so as to be ready at hand, and orders having been given that not a word should be spoken, even in a whisper, a perfect silence reigned over the spot.

Ralph and Percy were near to each other. They had exchanged a hearty grip of the hand before lying down,

and now lay, with beating hearts and hands firmly grasping their rifles, in readiness for the signal.

The time was not very long, only a few minutes, but it seemed to them an age before they heard the tramp of horses. Nearer and nearer they came, and now they could hear the jingling of accoutrements. First, through their leafy screen, they could see two Uhlans pass at a walk, scanning keenly the woods, and looking for possible danger. The bushes were thick, and they noticed nothing and kept on at the same pace. It is probable, indeed, that they really anticipated no possibility of an attack, as the Dijon franc-tireurs were the first who appeared upon the scene of action, and the Prussians were consequently in entire ignorance of the vicinity of any armed body of the enemy, and at worst apprehended a stray shot from a straggler from one of the French armies hidden in the woods.

In another minute or two four more Uhlans passed, and after the same interval came the main body, escorting a number of cattle and sheep. The greater portion had passed the spot where the boys were lying, and were opposite the whole line of franc-tireurs when the silence of the wood was broken by Major Tempé's shout "Now!" Before the Uhlans had time to rein in their horses or to ask each other what was the meaning of the cry, the flash of thirty rifles broke from the trees, and several men fell from their horses. There was a momentary panic, followed by a hurried discharge of carbines at the invisible foe.

The captain of the Uhlans, a handsome young officer with light moustache and beard, shouted to his men,

"Steady, they are only a handful; form line, charge!" Quickly as the manœuvre was executed the franc-tireurs had time to fire again, and then in accordance with their orders, retreated, and joined their comrades by passages left in the abattis on purpose. In another instant the Uhlans charged, but, as quickly, the direst confusion reigned where before had been a regular line. The wire had served its purpose, horses and men went down on the top of each other, and thirty rifles again fumed their deadly hail into the confused mass. The second line of Uhlans who had not charged returned the fire of their invisible enemies, and although they could not see them, several of the balls took effect.

Nothing could be cooler than the officers of the Uhlans, and their voice and example steadied their men. Under cover of the fire of their comrades the men in part extricated themselves and their horses, and drew back behind the wood. Orders were then given for all to dismount, and leaving their horses to be held by parties of their comrades, four horses to one man, the rest advanced on foot against their apparently greatly inferior foe, keeping up a heavy fire with their carbines. This was what the commandant of the franc-tireurs had hoped for and expected.

The wire had been broken down by the weight of the horses, and the Prussians advanced opposed only by a feeble return to their heavy fire until within five paces of the leafy wall. Then the fire from a hundred rifles flashed out upon them.

The effect was terrible, and a cry of surprise and rage burst from those who had escaped its effect. It was evident

that they had fallen into an ambush. The captain, wild with rage and mortification at the fault he had committed, rushed forward, and his men gallantly seconded his efforts. In vain, however, did they try to separate the interlaced boughs, while as they struggled, the shots from the enemy flashed out thick and fast. In another moment the young captain threw up his arms and fell, shot through the heart. The officer next in command ordered a retreat, the horses were regained, and amidst a continuous fire from the franc-tireurs the diminished troop galloped back towards Blamont.

The franc-tireurs now quitted their leafy fortress. A small party was at once sent forward up the valley to give notice if the Uhlans showed any signs of returning. A strong body set to work to drive in the scattered animals, which were galloping wildly about the valley, while the rest collected the dead and wounded.

Of the franc-tireurs eight were killed, fourteen wounded. Of the Uhlans forty-seven were killed, and nineteen wounded remained on the ground. Their large number of killed in proportion to the wounded was accounted for by the fact that the firing was so close that in many cases the coats of the dead men were actually singed by the explosion, while the slightly wounded men had been able to regain their horses and escape.

The first impulse of the young Barclays when the fire ceased was to turn round and to embrace each other with delight on finding that they had each escaped without a scratch, and then to shake hands heartily with their cousins, whose fortune had been equally good.

There was no time for words, however, for Major

Tempé's order came sharp and decisive, "You the Barclays, you also the Duburgs, sling your arms, and go assist to drive in the cattle; quick, lose no time. You have done well; I am content with you, my boys." With a flush of pleasure the boys started off to carry out the orders which had been given by their commander with the kind thought of sparing the lads the terrible sight of the "battle ground."

The short but desperate conflict through which they had passed seemed to the young Barclays almost like a dream. In the excitement of loading and firing, in the tumult and the rattle, they had scarcely had time even to give a thought to the danger. Fear is seldom felt by the soldier when engaged in close conflict. The time when his nerves are most tried is while waiting inactive at a distance, exposed to a heavy shell fire, or while advancing to an attack under a storm of musketry and artillery. In a hand-to-hand conflict he has no time to think; his nerves are strung up to so high a pitch that he no longer thinks of danger or death. His whole thoughts are given to loading and firing. Any thought that the boys had given to danger was not for themselves, but for each other; and Ralph, though his own position was unsheltered, had once or twice spoken to Percy to keep his body better sheltered by the trees behind which he was standing.

It was a long chase before the frightened animals were collected together, and driven up towards the spot where the fight had taken place. By the time that it was accomplished the wounded had been collected, and the surgeons had bandaged many of their wounds.

A qualified surgeon had accompanied the corps as its regular doctor, and two other young surgeons had enlisted in its ranks, and these, their arms laid by, were now assisting to stanch the wounds and to apply bandages. Of the franc-tireurs there were only four so seriously wounded that they were unable to walk. By that time two carts arrived from the village of Doutéppe, which stood in the valley, half a mile only from the scene of action, and to which place Major Tempé had sent off a messenger directly the affair had terminated. In one of these the wounded were placed, while in the other were piled the arms and accoutrements of the fallen Uhlans.

One of the young surgeons was to accompany the wounded as far as Baccarat, where they were to remain for treatment. Twenty-three horses of the Uhlans had also been captured by the party who had driven in the cattle, among whom they were galloping. Four men were told off to take them back to Epinal, and there dispose of them, with their accoutrements, for the benefit of the military chest of the corps.

The question then arose as to what was to be done with the Prussian wounded. Major Tempé decided this by saying that as it was quite impossible for the corps to be burdened with wounded men, the best plan was to allow one of the slightly wounded among the prisoners to walk back to Blamont with a message that the Uhlans could come back to fetch their wounded without molestation, as the franc-tireurs were upon the point of taking their departure.

The corps then assembled round a grave which had

already been dug, and into it the bodies of their comrades who had fallen were placed. Major Tempé then said a few brief words of adieu, hoping that all who fell might die equally bravely and victoriously; then the sods were shovelled in, and the men, saddened by the scene, though still flushed with the triumph of their first and signal success, prepared to leave the spot.

Major Tempé had already held a consultation with his officers, and their plan of operation had been decided upon. The difficulty which they had encountered the evening before with the horse and cart had already proved that it would be impossible to drag it about with them. They had also taken thirty fine cattle and upwards of a hundred sheep from the enemy, and it was therefore resolved to establish a sort of head-quarters in the mountains, where they could retire after their expeditions, and defy the efforts of the Prussians to disturb them. The spot fixed upon was the Forest of Bousson, high up among the Vosges, and distant two hard days' marching. A portion of the troop, therefore, went round to Halloville, to fetch the accoutrements, blankets, &c., which had been left there, while the rest marched by the road to the place where the cart had been left the night before. Two peasants were engaged as guides, and in the afternoon the corps started for their destination.

It was a terrible march, the roads were mere tracks, and the weather was terrible. Over and over again the men had to unload the carts, shoulder the contents, and carry them for a considerable distance until ground was reached where the cart could again be loaded.

It was not until late on the evening of the third day's march that, thoroughly done up by fatigue and hardship, the corps reached the little village of Raon, in the heart of the forest of Bousson. There was no possible fear of attack here, and the commandant decided that for the night there was no occasion for any of the men to be out as sentries. The villagers at once took charge of the animals, and turned them into a rough enclosure. The men were too much done up even to care about keeping awake until supper could be cooked, and being divided among the houses of the village, they threw themselves down, and were fast asleep in a few minutes.

The next morning the sun shone out brightly, and the men, turning out after a long sleep, felt quite different creatures to the tired band who had wearily crawled into the village. The bright sky, the fresh morning air, the pleasant odour of the great pine-forest around them, and the bracing atmosphere at the height of 1500 feet above the sea, at once refreshed and cheered them.

There was a brief morning parade, at which Tim Doyle, for the first time, took his place with a rifle on his shoulder, and then the Major dismissed them, saying that there would be no further parade that day, and that the men could amuse themselves as they liked.

In a short time every man was following the bent of his own inclination. First, however, there was a general cleaning of the rifles and accoutrements, then most of the men went down to the stream, and there was a great washing of clothes, accompanied with much laughing and

joking. Then needles and threads were obtained from the women of the village, and there was much mending and darning, for the past three days' work among rocks and woods had done no little damage to their uniforms. Next came the grand operation of breakfast, for which two of the sheep had been killed. This being the first regular meal that they had had for three days was greatly enjoyed; after it was eaten most of the men lit their pipes and prepared to pass a day of delightful idleness. Two or three of the village boys had been engaged as cowherds and shepherds, and the animals were all driven out into the woods, where, in the open glades, they would find an abundance of food. The cart was unanimously condemned as worse than useless. An empty shed was turned into a storehouse, and it was determined that such stores of powder, &c., as might be required upon each expedition should be packed upon the horse's back, and if the horse could not take all required that other horses should be hired.

The Barclays, with their cousins, started for a ramble in the wood, taking with them the Irishman, whose good humour and unflagging spirits during the last three days had made him a general favourite.

"Sure, and are there any wild bastes in the wood, your honour? because, if there be, it would be well to take our rifles with us. It would be mighty unpleasant to come across a lion or a tiger, and not to be able to pass him the time of day."

"No, Tim, we shall meet neither lions nor tigers, so you need not trouble yourself with a rifle. A hundred years ago we might have met with a bear or a wild boar."

but they have disappeared long since. It is possible that there are a few wolves scattered about, but they are never formidable to any but a solitary person, even in winter, and at all other times fly from man's approach."

The party had a charming ramble, for the scenery here was very fine. At times the forest was so thick that they could see no glimpse of the sky, and the trunks of the trees seemed to make a wall all round them; then, again, it would open, and they would obtain a glimpse over the country far away, rise beyond rise, to the plains of Champagne; or if the view were behind, instead of in front of them, they could see the tops of the highest range of the Vosges, rising hill above hill, and often wooded to the very summit; the Donon, one of the highest points of the range, being immediately behind them.

The villages are here few and far between, and the people extremely poor, for the soil is poor, and although in summer the cattle, which form their only wealth, are able to pick up an abundance of food in the forests, they have a hard struggle to keep them alive during the winter. Their language is German, and their appearance and dress rather German than French, but notwithstanding this, they were thoroughly French in spirit, and regarded the invaders with an intense hatred.

Another day passed in rest completely restored the most exhausted of the band. Orders were, therefore, issued for an early start the next morning, the object this time being to endeavour to cut the railway. The band were to march in a body for the slopes of the

Vosges, behind Sarrebourg and Saverne, and were then to divide into companies and scatter themselves among the villages between Lorquin and Marmontier, so as to act together or separately, as it might seem expedient.





CHAPTER VI.

THE TUNNEL OF SAVERNE.

IT is needless to follow the corps step by step through their marches, for the names of the little villages through which they passed would not be found in any maps published in England, and would therefore possess little interest for English readers. After two days' long marches the main body of the corps reached a village situated in a wood, at about four miles from the great rock tunnel of Saverne. The fourth company had been left at a village five miles to the left, while the third company were next day to march forward to a place at about the same distance to the right. Their orders were to keep a sharp look out, to collect news of the movements and strength of the enemy, but not to undertake any expedition, or to do any thing whatever to lead the enemy to guess at their presence in the neighbourhood, as it was of vital importance that they should not be put upon their guard until the great blow was struck.

As soon as they had marched into the village, the principal inhabitants came forward, and a consultation was held as to providing lodgings. After some conversation it was agreed that the officers should have quarters in the village, and that the schoolrooms, two in number, should be placed at the disposal of the men. They were good-sized rooms, and would hold thirty men each without difficulty. The company who were to march forward in the morning were provided with quarters in the village.

Ralph and Percy Barclay, as usual, acted as interpreters between Major Tempé and the inhabitants, for neither the Major nor any of his officers spoke German. That language, indeed, was spoken only by a few men in the whole corps, and these the Commandant had divided among the other companies, in order that each company might be able to shift for itself when separated from the main body.

“Have you seen this proclamation?” one of the villagers asked. “You see that we are running no little risk in taking you in.”

Ralph read it, and as he did so his face flushed with indignation, and he exclaimed: “This is infamous! infamous!”

“What is it?” Major Tempé asked.

“It is a proclamation from the Prussian General commanding the district, Major, giving notice that he will shoot every franc-tireur he may catch; and also giving notice to the inhabitants that if any Prussian soldier be killed, or even shot at, by a franc-tireur, if a rail be pulled up or a road cut, that he will hold the village

near the spot accountable ; will burn the houses, and treat the male inhabitants according to martial law, and that the same penalties will be exacted for sheltering or hiding franc-tireurs."

"Impossible!" Major Tempé said, astounded. "No officer of a civilized army could issue such an edict. Besides, during an invasion of Germany the people were summoned by the King of Prussia to take up arms, to cut roads, destroy bridges, and shoot down the enemy, just as we are going to do now. It is too atrocious to be true."

"There it is in black and white," Ralph said ; "there can be no mistake as to the wording."

Major Tempé looked grieved as well as indignant. "This will be a terrible business," he said, "if the war is to be carried on in this way. Of course, if they give us no quarter we shall give them none. That is, we must make as many prisoners as we can, in order that if any of our men are taken prisoners we may carry out reprisals if they shoot them. It will, besides this, do us great harm. Naturally, the villagers, instead of looking upon us as defenders, will regard us as the most dangerous of guests. They will argue, 'If we make no resistance the Prussians may plunder us, but at least our houses and our lives are safe ; whereas if these franc-tireurs are found to have been with us, or if they make any attack in our neighbourhood, we are not only plundered, but burnt out and shot !' Of course we are always liable to treachery. There are scoundrels always to be found who would sell their own mothers, but now even the most patriotic cannot but feel that they are running an immense risk in

sheltering us. Never before, I believe, in the annals of civilized nations, did a man in authority dare to proclaim that persons should suffer for a crime with which they had nothing whatever to do. If we arrive at a little village how are the people to say to us 'We will not allow you to pull up a rail!' and yet if they do not prevent us they are to be punished with fire and sword. And these people call themselves a civilized nation! One of the evil consequences of this proclamation is that we shall never dare trust to the inhabitants to make inquiries for us. They will be so alarmed in case we should attempt any thing in their neighbourhood that they would be sure to do and say every thing they could to dissuade us from it; and if inclined to treachery, might even try to buy their own safety by betraying us."

Major Tempé was speaking to the other officers, who thoroughly agreed with his opinion. Ralph and Percy had remained in the room, in case any further questions might be asked in reference to the proclamation. They now asked if any thing else were required, and upon a negative answer being given, saluted and took their leave.

It was dusk when they went out, and as they walked towards the schoolroom they heard a great tumult of voices raised in anger, among which they recognized that of Tim Doyle.

"Howld yer jaw, you jabbering apes," he exclaimed, in great wrath; "give me a lantern or a candle and let me begone, the boys are all waiting for me to begin."

Hurrying up they found Tim surrounded by a few of the principal inhabitants of the village, and soon learned the cause of the dispute. Supper was served, but it was

too dark to see to eat it, and Tim, always ready to make himself useful, had volunteered to go in search of a light. He had in vain used his few words of French with the villagers he met, and these had at last called the schoolmaster, the only person in the village who understood French. This man had addressed Tim first in French and then in German, and upon receiving no coherent answer in either language, had arrived at the conclusion that Tim was making fun of them. Hence the dispute had arisen.

The boys explained matters, and the villagers, whose knowledge of England was of the very vaguest description, and most of whom, indeed, had previously believed that all the world spoke either French or German, were profuse in apologies, and immediately procured some candles, with which Tim and the boys hastened to the schoolroom.

Two candles were given to each company, and one being lighted at each end of the room, and stuck upon nails in the wall, the boys were enabled to see what the place was like. Clean straw had been littered a foot deep down each side of the room, and fifteen blankets were folded side by side along by each wall. Upon pegs above, meant for the scholars' caps, hung the haversacks, water-bottles, and other accoutrements, while the rifles were piled along the centre of the room, leaving space enough to walk down upon either side between them and the beds.

At the farther end of the room was a large fire-place, in which a log fire was blazing, and a small shed outside had been converted into a kitchen.

"We might be worse off than this a long way, Ralph," said Louis Duburg, as Ralph took his place on the straw next to him.

"That we might, Louis. The fire looks cheerful, too, and the nights are getting very cold."

"That they are, Louis. Ah! here is supper. I am quite ready for that too."

The men who officiated as cooks, and who by agreement had been released from all night-duty in consideration of their regularly undertaking that occupation, now brought in a large saucepanful of soup, and each man went up with his canteen and received his portion, returning to his bed upon the straw to eat it.

"Any thing new, Barclay?" one of the men asked from the other side of the room.

"Yes, indeed," Ralph said. "New and disagreeable. Mind none of you get taken prisoners, for the Prussian general has issued a proclamation that he shall shoot all franc-tireurs he catches."

"Impossible!" came in a general chorus from all present.

"Well, it sounds like it, but it is true enough," and Ralph repeated word for word the proclamation which he had translated to Major Tempé. As might have been expected, it raised a perfect storm of indignation, and this lasted until, at nine o'clock, the sergeant gave the word, "lights out."

In the morning, after parade, Ralph and Percy strolled away together, and had a long talk, and at the end of an hour they walked to the house where Major Tempé had established his head-quarters.

“Good morning, my friends,” he said as they entered ; “is there any thing I can do for you ? sit down.”

“We have been thinking, sir, Percy and I, that we could very easily dress up as peasants, and go down to Saverne, or any where you might think fit, and find out all particulars as to the strength and position of the enemy. No one would suspect two boys of being franc-tireurs, it would be unlikely in the extreme that any one would ask us any questions, and if we were asked we should say we belonged to some village in the mountains, and had come down to buy coffee, and other necessaries. The risk of detection would be next to nothing, for we speak German quite well enough to pass for lads from the mountains.”

Major Tempé was silent a minute. “You know you would be shot at once if you were detected.”

“No doubt sir, but there is no reason in the world why we should be detected. The Prussians can’t know every one by sight, even within the town itself, and will not notice us at all ; if they do, our answer is sufficient.”

“I tell you frankly, boys, I was thinking only last night of the matter, but however much you may make light of it, there is, of course, a certain amount of danger in acting as spies, and your father, my friend Captain Barclay, might say to me, if evil came of it, ‘I gave you my boys to fight for France, and you have sent them to their death as spies.’ So I resolved to say nothing about it.”

“But now we have offered, sir, the case is different,” Ralph said. “From our knowledge of the language, and from our age, we are better fitted than any one in the

corps to perform this service, and therefore it would be clearly our duty to perform it were it greatly more dangerous than it is. Our father said to us at starting, 'Do your duty, boys, whatever the danger.' We will see about our clothes, there can be no difficulty about that, there are several lads in the village whose things would fit us. Shall we come in this afternoon for instructions?"

"Thank you, lads," Major Tempé said warmly. "I trust, with you, that no harm will come of it. But your offer is of too great advantage to the corps for me to persist in my refusal."

Upon leaving the quarters of the commandant, the boys went at once to the house of a farmer, a short distance from the village, where the day before they had noticed two boys of about their own size. They explained to the farmer that they wanted to buy of him a suit of the working clothes of each of his sons. Greatly surprised at this request, the farmer had inquired what they could possibly want them for, and Ralph, who thought it better not to trust him with the secret, replied that as the Prussian general had given notice that he should shoot all franc-tireurs he might take prisoners, they wanted a suit of clothes each, which they might slip on in case of defeat, or danger of capture. The pretence was a plausible one, and the farmer sold them the required clothes charging only about twice their cost when new.

The boys took the parcel, and instead of returning to the village direct, they hid it carefully in a wood at a short distance away. They then returned, and in the after-

noon received detailed instructions from Major Tempé. It was arranged that the matter should be kept entirely secret, lest any incautious word might be overheard and reported. They were to start at daybreak upon the following morning; their cousins and Tim Doyle being alone taken into their confidence; their friends regretted much that they could not accompany them and share their danger. The boys pointed out, however, that even could they have spoken German fluently, they could not have gone with them, as, although two strangers would excite no attention whatever, five would be certain to do so.

The next morning they started together as if for a walk. Upon reaching the spot in the wood where the peasant's clothes were hidden, the boys took off their uniforms, which were wrapped up and concealed in the same place, and put on the clothes. They fitted fairly, and more than that was not necessary, as peasants' clothes are seldom cut accurately to the figure. Rounding their shoulders, and walking with clumping sorts of strides, no one would have imagined that they were other than they pretended to be, two awkward-looking young Alsatian lads. They cut two heavy sticks, exchanged a hearty good bye with their friends, and started for Saverne.

Two hours later they were walking in its streets, staring into the shop-windows, and at every thing that was going on, with the open-mouthed curiosity of two young country lads. Then they made a few purchases, some coffee, sugar, and pepper, tied them in a coloured pocket-handkerchief, and then went into a small cabaret where

they saw some German soldiers drinking, sat down at a table, and called for some bread and cheese and beer. While they were taking them, they listened to the conversation of the soldiers. The only information that they gleaned from it was that the men seemed to have no expectation whatever of any early movement, and that they were heartily sick of the monotony of the place, and the hard work of patrolling the line of railway night and day.

Presently the soldiers paid for their beer and left, and some of the townspeople came in and took the places they had left. Their conversation of course turned on the Prussian occupation, and deep were the curses heaped upon the invaders. The only thing mentioned in their favour was the smallness of their number. There were not over two hundred men; and this amount weighed but lightly upon Saverne, compared with the fifty, sixty, or a hundred quartered at every little village along the line of railway.

The boys had now learnt what they most wanted to know, and paying for their refreshment, went out again into the street. Then they walked to the railway station, where they saw several soldiers on guard, and then set off to a point where they could see the entrance to the tunnel. There two soldiers were on guard; while others were stationed at short distances all along the line.

The boys now went up to a wood whence, unseen themselves, they could watch the trains passing. They came along nearly every half hour; immensely long trains filled with stores of all kinds. As it became dusk they saw a body of Prussian soldiers marching down the



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line, relieving the sentries, and placing fresh ones at distances of little more than fifty yards apart. These marched backwards and forwards until they met each other, then returning until they faced their comrade at the other end of their beat.

“We can be off now, Percy,” Ralph said, rising; “our news is bad, for it will be by no means so easy to cut the line as we had expected. These weasels won’t be very easily caught asleep.”

“No, indeed,” Percy said; “the idea of cutting the line sounded so easy when we were at a distance, but it is quite a different matter now we are here.”

Upon their return they found with some difficulty the place where they had hidden their uniforms; again changed clothes, and then carrying those they had just taken off, made up into bundles, they re-entered the village, and went straight to head-quarters.

Major Tempé was at dinner with the other officers, and received them with great pleasure, for he had been anxious all day lest any misfortune might befall them.

Finding that they had had nothing to eat since early in the morning, he at once invited them to sit down to dinner, for military discipline is far less strict in these matters in France than it is in England, and among the corps of franc-tireurs especially, as among the English volunteers, where the private is, in many cases equal to, or superior to his officer in social standing, the difference of rank is very much put aside, except on duty.

“And you say that they have a sentinel at every fifty or sixty yards along the line?” Major Tempé said, when

Ralph had given an account of their day's investigation. "That appears to me to be fatal to our plans."

"Why so?" Lieutenant de Maupas, who commanded the first company, asked. "It seems to me that nothing could be easier. Suppose we fell upon any given point, the sentries near it would be at once killed or made prisoners; and even allowing, as young Barclay says, that there are troops in all the villages, it would be a good half-hour before a force sufficient to disturb us could arrive."

"That is true enough," Major Tempé answered. "But what could we do in half an hour? We might pull up two hundred yards of rail. What real advantage would be gained by that? The line of sentries along the rail would, by firing their rifles, pass the news ten miles in half as many minutes, and the trains would be stopped long before they arrived at the break. Each train carries, I know, workmen and materials for repairing the line; and as it would be impossible for us to carry away the rails after pulling them up, they would be replaced in as short a time as it took us to tear them up; and the consequence would be, that the traffic would only be suspended for an hour or two at most. For a break to be of any real utility whatever, it must last for days, if not for weeks. The great *coup*, of course, would be the destruction of the rock-tunnel of Saverne, which was the special object of our presence here. Failing that, we must try a bridge. The tunnel, however, is the great affair. Once destroyed, there would be no repairing it for many weeks. My proposition is, therefore, that we turn our attention at once to that point."

There was a general murmur of assent.

“The best course would be for Hardin’s company to march direct to the other end of the tunnel, seize it, and prevent interference from that end; while the others then seize the Saverne end, and hold it while preparations are made for blowing it up. Then, when the match is lighted, fall back, if possible, before the arrival of heavy bodies of the enemy.”

“Nothing could be better,” Lieutenant de Maupas exclaimed, and the other officers agreed with him.

“What day do you propose for the movement?”

“The day after to-morrow at daybreak,” Major Tempé said. “That will give us plenty of time to send orders to the other two companies, and the sooner it is done the better.”

The conference was about to break up, when the surgeon, who had listened in silence, said, “The general plan is simple enough; but, tell me, how do you propose to set about blowing the tunnel up? You may be able to hold it for half an hour, at most. How do you think of proceeding?”

Major Tempé and his officers looked at each other. They had not as yet thought the matter over, but the instant it was put plainly before them, they saw the difficulty.

“Oh,” Lieutenant de Maupas said confidently, “we shall, of course, put the nitro-glycerine somewhere in the middle of the tunnel, and blow the whole affair up.”

Lieutenant de Maupas had been a sailor, and his quickness of decision and go-ahead straightforward way of doing every thing made him at once a favourite and

an amusement to the men, who had nicknamed him "Grande Vitesse," or, as we should say in English, the "Express."

"I am afraid the matter is rather more difficult than you imagine, De Maupas," Major Tempé said, with a smile. "This is in Ribouville's way; as he was in the engineers he will know all about it."

The officer named, however, did not reply for some little time, but sat with his head on his hand in deep thought."

"I feel ashamed to own it," he said at last; "but I really do not know how one could set about the matter so as to have a chance of really destroying the tunnel after so short a time for preparation. Were the tunnel an ordinary brick-lined tunnel, the proposition of De Maupas, slightly modified, would no doubt have the effect of bringing down the brick lining, and the earth behind would fall in of itself; but with a tunnel cut in the solid rock it would be difficult. The natural strength of the tunnel would be so great, that the force of the explosion would simply be lost through the ends. It might or might not bring down a few masses of rock, but one could not rely upon it doing even that. If I had time the matter would be easy enough. I should make a deep chamber in the solid rock at the side of the tunnel, insert my charge, and then tamp or fasten it in with masonry. This would insure its destruction at the point of explosion; but I have no hope of any great damage being done by merely putting two barrels of nitro-glycerine down upon the line, and then firing them. I can assure you the point mooted by the doctor is most serious; and, as far as I see at present, I could do nothing in half an

hour which would in any way insure the destruction of the tunnel. To make such a chamber as I speak of (to hold two barrels of nitro-glycerine) would be the work of four or five days, working night and day, even with the aid of powder; and, of course, it would be out of the question to hope for as many hours."

There was a pause of consternation as Lieutenant Ribouville spoke. Here was the end of the grand scheme from which they had expected so much. At this time the Germans had no other line of rail at their command, and the destruction of the tunnel would have been a disaster equal to that of the loss of a pitched battle.

"There would be no chance, would there, of our hiding in the woods under which the tunnel runs, so as to bore down to it, and blow it in from above?" Major Tempé asked.

"None whatever. The depth to be bored would be considerable, the stone is hard, and it could not be pierced without the use of powder, which would betray our presence; and even could we use it, and were the men all good miners, it would be a work of months at the very least."

There was a silence for some minutes, and then the Commandant said, "We cannot give it up without a trial. Think it over, Ribouville, for the next three or four days. You may be able to pitch upon some plan; if you cannot do so, we must at last try the experiment of exploding our nitro-glycerine in the middle of the tunnel, or, at any rate, as far in as we can carry it and make our retreat in the half-hour, which is all the time we can calculate upon holding the entrance."



CHAPTER VII.

A BAFFLED PROJECT.

BEFORE leaving the head-quarters of the Commandant, the young Barclays asked if he wished that they should continue to keep silence upon the subject of their expedition. The Commandant replied that he did not see that it could do any harm, provided that they impressed upon their comrades the necessity of maintaining an absolute silence upon the subject when any of the people of the neighbourhood were present. Although the villages might appear to understand no language but German, they might yet know enough French to glean what was said, and, if traitorously inclined, to warn the Germans, and thus enormously increase the danger when the Barclays should again go down to the town.

Their cousins had already heard of their return, for the boys, upon sitting down to dinner at the Commandant's, had requested leave to send a line to their cousins, who would be anxiously expecting them.

"Hallo! you Barclay, where have you been to all day?" was the general exclamation as they entered.

"On duty," Ralph said.

"On duty—yes, but what duty? The Duburgs have been mysterious, and would say nothing. The sergeant here knew nothing about it except that our lieutenant told him that you had leave, and Irish Tim has been hanging about all day as restless as a cow that has lost its calf."

"We have been down to Saverne," Ralph said.

There was a general exclamation of astonishment. Those of the men who had already lain down upon their straw for the night sat up again, and all crowded round to hear Ralph's story, which he at once told at length, and which, when finished, gave rise here, as it had done at the officers' table, to an animated discussion. Several of the men shook hands warmly with the Barclays, congratulating them on their offer to undertake this dangerous service, and upon the valuable though unfavourable information which they had obtained. From this time forward the men ceased to attempt to pass jokes at the expense of any of the boys. When the corps was first raised, many of the young men had been inclined to protest against boys being accepted when the list could have been readily filled with men; but by this time the boys had proved that they were quite as capable of supporting fatigue as were the men. They had behaved equally well in action, and now the enterprise of the Barclays testified to the fact that in a dangerous expedition requiring coolness, presence of mind, and nerve, they were equally to be relied upon. Henceforward

there was no distinction or difference between the various members of the corps.

Another four days passed, and as the ex-officer of engineers could suggest no certain plan for the destruction of the tunnel which could be carried out in the time which a surprise of the sentries at its mouth would give them, Major Tempé resolved upon delaying no longer, but on sending four men into the tunnel under Lieutenant Ribouville, with instructions to go as far as they could in a quarter of an hour, to set down the barrels against the rock, to light a fuze cut to burn a quarter of an hour, and then to return at full speed to the mouth of the tunnel. One company was to seize the other end, to tear up seven, eight, or ten rails, and to retire at once into the woods, as the delay in getting the rails into their places again would prevent any train entering from that end in time for its occupants to see and extinguish the burning fuze. The other company, which was absent, was to join the head-quarters the evening before the attempt, and it was hoped that the three companies would be able to keep the enemy at bay for half an hour, so as to give time to the party with the nitro-glycerine to take it to the required position and rejoin their comrades. Immediately upon their doing so the retreat was to commence, as the enemy could not possibly penetrate the tunnel and extinguish the fuse before the explosion took place. The attempt was not to be made till the following evening, in order that the Barclays might go down and see that all was as before in Saverne and along the line.

The next day accordingly the boys again put on their

disguises, and started, as before taking the precaution to change in the wood, so as not to be seen by any of the villagers.

Upon reaching the spot from which a view of the tunnel was obtainable, they stopped with a simultaneous exclamation of dismay. Not only were two sentries stationed near the entrance, but some fifteen or twenty German soldiers were sitting or standing by a small building at a short distance, which had evidently been turned into a guard-house.

“This looks very much against us, Ralph. One would think that they had got information of our being near.”

“It looks bad indeed, Percy. Let us go on into the town; we shall perhaps learn something about it there.”

A sharp walk soon brought them to Saverne. A sentry was on duty at the entrance to the town, and several of his comrades stood near. The sentry looked as if about to stop them, but seeing when they came up that they were only boys, he let them pass without question.

“Worse and worse, Percy; something is up, sure enough.”

This became more evident at every step they took, for the little town was absolutely crowded with German soldiers.

“Unless they are merely halting here upon their march through, it is all up with our plan, Percy. There must be over two thousand men here, at the very least.” Upon questioning a lad of the town of about their own age, they found that the fresh troops had arrived upon the preceding day—the infantry, two thousand strong,

coming in by train late in the evening before, and three hundred cavalry marched in only half an hour before the boys' arrival. They were all quartered upon the inhabitants, and there appeared to be no sign of their early departure.

For some time the boys walked about without obtaining any information, although they entered a dozen cabarets and drank considerable quantities of beer. At last, before one of the principal cafés, they saw ten or twelve German officers sitting talking. None of the inhabitants were sitting at the café, and the boys dared not go in to ask for any thing there, as it would not have been in accordance with their appearance.

“How are we to get within hearing, Percy?”

“Look here, Ralph: I will limp along as if I had something in my shoe which hurts me, then I will sit down on a doorstep close to them, and take off my boot. You can sit down too, and take some of the bread and cheese which we put in our pockets because we could not eat it at the last place we went in. I will keep my boot off to ease my foot, and we can eat our bread and cheese as slowly as we like.”

“That will do capitally, Percy.”

In another couple of minutes the two lads were sitting, as agreed, upon the step of a door close to the café. They could not hear all that was said, but could catch the sense, as the German officers, as is their custom, spoke in a very loud voice. They belonged to the infantry, and were, it appeared, in ignorance of the reason of their sudden move to Saverne.

Presently a captain of the cavalry came along the street.

"Ah, Von Rausen," a major in the infantry exclaimed, "are you here? I have not seen you since the day you marched from Coblentz."

"No, indeed, major," the other said, saluting as a Prussian officer always does to his superior in rank, the other infantry officers all rising and saluting in turn. "We have just come in from Hagenau."

"Are you in a hurry?" asked the major. "If not, sit down and let us talk."

The cavalry officer accepted the invitation, and for a few minutes their talk ran upon mutual friends. Then the major said, "By-the-way, do you know what we are here for? We were hustled off at a moment's notice, no one knows why, except of course the colonel, and he has not thought necessary to tell us, and naturally we have not asked him."

"Do you not know?" Captain Von Rausen said. "It is no secret—at least, no secret from us, but a secret from the people here. I will speak in French: no doubt there are plenty of spies about."

"There is no one in hearing," the major said, "except those two stupid-looking lads munching bread and cheese."

"The more likely to be spies," Von Rausen said. "Fellows who look like fools are just the people chosen."

"Well, speak in English, then, Von Rausen," the major said; "we both understand it, and we should be safe then if all Saverne were listening."

"Yes, that will be safe. Well, then, the general received information yesterday that that corps of franc-tireurs who cut up our cavalry near Blamont the other day are hid up in some village in the woods four or five

miles from here, no doubt with the intention of making an attempt to blow up the tunnel. The idea is a daring one, and if the plan had succeeded it would have done us incalculable harm ; as it is, we are safe, and to-morrow night we shall, I believe, make an expedition, and sweep the woods clear of these troublesome gentry. These franc-tireurs will be mischievous if we do not give them a sharp lesson. The general's proclamation gave notice that every one of them taken would be shot, and our colonel is just the man to carry out the order."

"This is indeed important," the major said. "But how did we get the information? Is it certain?"

"Quite certain. A scoundrel of a schoolmaster at Grunsdorf, a village somewhere up in the woods, turned traitor, and sent a letter to the general, bargaining that he should be taken on as a spy at some fabulous salary, and offering to begin by leading the troops to the village where these franc-tireurs are hidden."

"An infamous scoundrel!" the major said warmly. "Of course one cannot refuse to deal with traitors when the information is of importance, but one longs to put a pistol-bullet into them. Badly as the French have come out in many particulars since the war began, there is not one which gives me such a mean idea of them as the number of offers which have been sent in to supply information and betray their countrymen."

"Put on your boots, Percy," Ralph said in a low voice, "it is time for us to be off. Don't hurry, and above all, if they should take it into their heads to address us suddenly in French or English, don't start or seem to notice."

The major was, however, too absorbed in the information he had received, and too confident that the English in which it had been told would be unintelligible to any one who might overhear it, that he paid no attention to the boys, who, one of them limping badly, went slowly down the street, stopping occasionally to look in at the shop windows. It was not until they were fairly outside the town and out of sight of the German sentries that they either spoke or quickened their pace.

“The franc-tireurs of Dijon may thank their lucky stars that they sent down spies to Saverne to-day, Percy, and especially that we of all the members of the corps were selected. If we had not been where we were just at that moment, and if we had not understood English, it would have been all up with the corps, and no mistake.”

“What an infamous scoundrel, as the major said, that schoolmaster must be, Ralph! What do you think the Commandant will do?”

“He has nothing to do but to retreat as quickly as we can go, Percy; but if it costs him half the corps I hope he will hang that schoolmaster before he goes.”

“I hope so too,” Percy said; and scarcely another word was spoken until they reached the village. It was still early, scarcely two o'clock, and Major Tempé was drilling the whole corps, the two detached companies having arrived that morning, when the boys, having again put on uniform, approached him. Major Tempé nodded to them as they came up. “You are back early,” he said. “You are excused from drill; I will see you at my quarters when it is over.”

"If you please, major," Ralph said respectfully, "you had better dismiss the men at once. We have news of the highest importance to tell you."

The major looked surprised, but seeing by the boys' faces that the news was very serious, he at once dismissed the men, telling them to keep near, as they might be wanted. Then, calling his officers, he proceeded at once with the Barclays towards his quarters.

"Excuse me, major," Ralph said, "but instead of going to your quarters would you move to some open space where we can speak without a possibility of being overheard by any one?"

Still more surprised, Major Tempé led the way to some felled trees at the edge of the forest a short distance from the village. Here he sat down, and motioned to the others to do the same.

Ralph then told his story, interrupted many times by exclamations of rage upon the part of his auditors, and giving full credit to Percy for his idea of the plan by which, unnoticed, they had managed to get within hearing of the German officers. The fury of the French officers knew no bounds: they gesticulated, they stamped up and down, they swore terribly, they were ready to cry from sheer rage.

Major Tempé alone uttered no remark during the whole narration. When it was concluded, he sat silent or a minute or two, with his lips pressed together, and a look of deep indignation on his face.

Then he rose, and said in a solemn tone, "As sure as the sun shines, and as sure as my name is Edward Tempé, so sure shall that schoolmaster of Grunsdorf be hung

before to-morrow morning! Lieutenant Ribouville, order the assembly to be sounded, and form the men here in hollow square. Messieurs Barclay, you will fall in with your company."

A little surprised and hurt that the Commandant had said no word of commendation to them for the service they had performed, the boys hurried off to their quarters to get their rifles. "Sure, Master Ralph, and what is the matter at all?" Tim Doyle said, as they entered. "Sure the major, honest man, must have gone off his head entirely! Scarcely had we finished our meal and began to smoke the first pipe in ease and comfort, when the bugle blows for parade. 'Confound the bugle!' says I, and I shoved me pipe aside, and put on my belt and fell in; hardly had we begun the manoeuvres when your honours arrived and said a word private to the major. The words weren't out of your mouth before he dismisses us from drill. 'Botheration,' says I, 'is there no pace for the wicked?' Back I comes again, and takes off me belt and piles me firelock, and before I had got three draws at me pipe, and was just beginning to enjoy the creature, when, crack! and there goes the assembly again. Sure, and the major, honest man, has lost his head entirely; and it's a pity, for he is an illigant man, and a good officer, says I."

"Come along, Tim," Ralph said, laughing, "else you'll be late for parade. You will hear all about it in time, I have no doubt."

In five minutes the men were all assembled in a hollow square, two deep, facing the officers in the centre. The men saw at once by the faces of Major Tempé and

the officers that something very serious had happened; and they had no sooner taken their places than there was a deep hush of expectancy, for it was evident that the Commandant was about to address them.

“My men,” he said, after a pause of a minute or two, “a great calamity has happened; and a still greater one would have happened had we not providentially received warning in time. It had been resolved, as you would have heard this evening, had all gone well, that to-night we should attack the German sentries, and blow up the rock-tunnel of Saverne. The affair would have been hot, but it would have been a vital service to France; and the franc-tireurs of Dijon would have merited and obtained the thanks of all France. It was for the purpose of the attack that the two companies detached from us were recalled. All promised well for success. Two of your number had been down into Saverne in disguise, and had brought us full information respecting the force and disposition of the enemy. All was prepared, the chance of success favourable, and the force the enemy could have brought against us was no larger than our own. We should have saved France, and immortalized ourselves. At the present moment there are two thousand five hundred men in Saverne. To-morrow night this village is to be attacked, and every franc-tireur found here put to the sword.”

A cry of surprise and rage broke from the men. “And how think you has the change been wrought? By treachery!”

Those cries of rage were renewed. “By treachery! A Frenchman has been found base and vile enough to

sell us to Prussia, all hope of success is over, and we have only to retreat."

"Who is he? who is he?" burst from the infuriated men. "Death to the traitor! death to the traitor!"

"Yes, men, death to the traitor!" the major said solemnly. "It is the schoolmaster of Grunsdorf who has sold you to the Prussians, who wrote that letter to their general telling him of your intentions, which has caused these great reinforcements to be sent, and who has offered to guide a force to surround us to-morrow night."

Another low cry of horror and indignation broke from the men.

"Is it your opinion that this man has deserved death?"

"Yes," was the unanimous answer.

"Then he dies," Major Tempé said solemnly. "You were to have been his victims; you are his judges. Grunsdorf is three miles from here in the woods, not far from Saverne. A party will be told off presently who will be charged with the execution of this sentence. I have now another duty. The corps has been saved from destruction. You—all of us—have been preserved from death by the intelligence and courage of two of your number. Ralph and Percy Barclay stand forward!"

The two boys stepped two paces forward into the hollow square.

"Selected by me," continued Major Tempé, "for the duty, from their perfect acquaintance with German, they, upon their first visit to Saverne, obtained all the information required. Upon their second visit, this morning,

finding the enemy had been immensely reinforced, they perceived the extreme importance of discovering the reason for the arrival of the reinforcements, and their intention. With a coolness and tact which does them the greatest credit, they contrived to arrive and to remain within hearing of a number of officers, and then learnt the whole particulars of the treachery of this man, and of the intention of our enemies. So important was the secret judged, that the Germans were afraid of telling it in German or in French lest they might be overheard. To prevent the possibility of this they conversed in English, and the consequence is that we are saved almost by a miracle. Ralph and Percy Barclay, your names will be inserted in the order of the day, being the first of the corps to whom that honour has been given; and I hereby offer you, in the name of myself, my officers, and the whole corps, my hearty thanks for your courage, coolness, and devotion. The parade is dismissed. The men will assemble at five o'clock in full marching order, with all necessaries and accoutrements."

As Major Tempé ceased speaking the men broke up from the order in which they had been standing, and crowded round the young Barclays, shaking them by the hand, patting them on the shoulder, and congratulating them heartily upon the service that they had rendered, and upon the terms in which their Commandant had thus publicly acknowledged it.

At five o'clock the corps assembled again in heavy marching order, and, after inspection, the second, third, and fourth companies marched off, with their officers,

who alone knew their destination, at their head. Major Tempé remained on the ground with the first company. After waiting for a few minutes they were marched off in the direction which the others had taken, but after getting out of sight of the village, and fairly entering the forest, they turned sharp off and took the direction of Saverne.





CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRAITOR.

AFTER the company had marched for half an hour a halt was called, and their commandant said, "I dare say you have all guessed the object which we have in view. We are going to carry out the sentence pronounced by the whole corps. We are going to have that schoolmaster, that traitor, who has sold our lives to the Prussians, and who, which is of infinitely greater importance, has done immense injury to France by betraying our intention of blowing up the tunnel. That traitor I intend to have to-night, and if I have him I will hang him as sure as fate. This lane which we are following leads to Grunsdorf, which, according to the information I collected before leaving, cannot be above a mile distant. Now we must be cautious. It is quite possible that a detachment of the enemy may have been sent up to the village, and in that case we might catch a Tartar. Even if there are no Germans there we must be cautious, or the bird will escape.

We neither know him nor the house he lives in, and as he would naturally guess that his treachery had been discovered, and that we had come for him, he would slip out into the forest the instant he saw the first bayonet approaching. It is essential therefore that we should obtain accurate information of the state of affairs, and of the position of this traitor's house. In another half-hour it will be dusk. The Barclays have again volunteered to go in and find out what we require. They will go on at once, and in an hour we will follow, and remain concealed just outside the village until they return. Sergeant, you will go forward with them, and agree upon the place where we shall remain hid until they join us. Now, my lads, you have already received your instructions, change your things and go forward at once."

The distance was farther than they had expected, and it was nearly dark before the boys entered Grunsdorf. There was no one moving in the quiet village, for a fine rain was falling as the boys walked slowly along.

"There is no one to ask, Percy. We must go into the public-house, as arranged, and ask where the priest's house is. It would not do for two strangers to ask for the schoolmaster. The priest will tell us where he lives."

So saying they entered the little cabaret, walked down a long passage leading from the door, and paused for a moment at the threshold, for in the room were some eight or ten Prussian soldiers.

"It is too late to retreat, Percy; come in boldly."

Lifting their caps they walked up to an unoccupied table, and called for some bread, cheese, and beer. The landlord brought the refreshments, and the boys had

scarcely begun to eat when a Prussian sergeant, who had exchanged a word with the landlord evidently in reference to them, strode up to them, and laying his hand upon Ralph's shoulder, said,—

“Who are you, young fellows? The landlord says you do not belong to the village.”

“We belong to a party of woodcutters, from Colmar,” Ralph said quietly.

“Oh, indeed!” the sergeant said in an incredulous voice; “and where are your party?”

“Out in the forest, at the place where we have begun to fell trees,” Ralph said.

“But people do not come to cut wood without horses or carts to take it away,” the sergeant persisted.

“They are up in the forest with our father,” Ralph said.

“Have you heard any thing about this party?” the sergeant asked the landlord.

The man hesitated a moment; he evidently suspected also that the boys might belong to the franc-tireurs, and was anxious to say nothing which could harm them.

“No,” he said, after a pause, “I can't say that I have heard of them, but I know some of the forest was sold not long ago, and they might have come from Colmar without coming this way.”

“We only arrived this morning,” Percy said quietly, “so that you could hardly have heard of us unless some of the people of your place happened to pass when we were at work, and we have not seen any one all day.”

“At any rate,” the sergeant said, “I shall see if your

story be true, and you will at once take us to the place. Corporal, get ten men in readiness.

"Certainly," Ralph said, "if you will allow us to finish our supper, we will show you the way at once."

The sergeant nodded and resumed his seat.

"Look here, Percy," Ralph said quietly, "we are in a nasty fix this time. There is only one thing to be done that I can see. If we both go they will shoot us to a certainty, for although one might make a bolt in the wood, it is certain we could not both get away. Only one thing is to be done. I will say your foot is bad, and ask for you to stay here. Directly we have gone you slip out, and go as hard as you can to the place where our men are hid. I will bring them in that direction. We shall have passed the place before you can reach it, at least unless you can get out at once, and pass on in the darkness. Take off your shoes, so as to run lightly. As we pass fire a volley right into us, and I will make a dart into the wood in the confusion."

"But you might be shot by our men, Ralph, they could not possibly distinguish you in the dark. No, I will go with the men, and you make your way to Tempé's."

"No, no, Percy, I won't have that."

"Very well," Percy said doggedly, "then we will go together."

There was a silence for a minute or two, and then Ralph said,—

"Look here, Percy, this is madness ; however, as you won't do as I tell you, we will draw lots. I will put a piece of crumb in one of my hands. You shall guess

which it is in. If you guess right I will go with the Germans, if you guess wrong you shall go."

"Very well," Percy said; "I agree to that."

Ralph then broke off a small piece of bread and put it in one of his hands, having already, before he made the proposition, broken off a similar piece unobserved by Percy. He then put both hands under the table and then lifted them again, all the time trying to appear not to be engaged upon any thing out of the way, as he knew that some of the Germans were watching them.

"Left," Percy said.

Ralph replied by opening the left hand and dropping the piece of bread on the table, at the same time putting his right hand back into his pocket as if to get out his handkerchief, and dropping, as he did so, the piece of bread it contained into the place.

"There, Percy, fortune has decided it. Good-bye, God bless you. I dare say I shall get out of it, but if not, give my love to them all at home."

Then he finished his beer, and rose, without giving Percy time to reply, even could he have done so, but the lad was so much choked with the effort to keep from crying that he could not have spoken. Ralph turned to the sergeant, and stretching his arms with the natural air of a tired boy objecting to be disturbed, said, "Now, sir, I am ready to start. I suppose there is no occasion for us both to go, for my brother has hurt his foot. We shouldn't have come in to-night, but it is his first time out with the woodmen, and he is not accustomed to sleeping out in the wet."

"Yes, one is enough; he can stay," the sergeant said.

“ You had better ask the landlord to show you a corner where you can sleep on the straw, Karl,” Ralph said. “ It is no use waiting for me, I shall be back in an hour.”

With a nod to Percy, Ralph now walked steadily to the door. The sergeant, with the men told off for the duty, accompanied him. When they reached the street it was raining heavily.

“ I wonder,” Ralph said, “ whether the landlord would lend me a sack to put on my shoulders.”

“ Is this place far off, youngster ? ” the sergeant asked, peering out into the darkness.

Ralph’s heart gave a jump, for he detected in the tone a certain hesitation as to taking the men out in such a night upon such slight suspicion. He was, however, too shrewd to show any desire to dissuade the sergeant from it, so he replied—

“ No, it is no distance to speak of; not a mile at most. We should be there and back in half an hour if it was light, but there is only a path among the woods and it is dark. I think we had better have some lanterns, for I do not think I could find my way without them to-night ; at any rate it would take us much longer.”

“ There, boy, that will do,” the sergeant said, laying his hand on his shoulder. “ I am satisfied now with the truth of your story. I thought for a bit you had something to do with the franc-tireurs who are about here, but I see I was mistaken. Turn in again, lads; it is no use taking you out on a useless search such a night as this among these forests.”

Ralph laughed aloud as they turned to go down the

passage again to the corner. "Won't father laugh," he said, "when he hears that you thought I was a franc-tireur. We haven't seen any about Colmar. I don't think you need be afraid of them if they aint bigger or older than I am."

By this time they had entered the room again, and Ralph saw that Percy was already talking to the landlord, with whom indeed he was on the point of leaving the room. He turned round upon hearing the party come in again, and gave a slight start of pleasure.

"I am soon back, Karl, and am glad that it is so, for frankly, I too am tired, and it is not a night for a dog to be out. I will go in with you."

"Stay, landlord," the sergeant said. "Give the boys another glass each before they go off."

"Thank you," Ralph said; "a glass of good beer never comes amiss."

The boys stopped while the landlord filled their glasses.

"Now," said the sergeant, raising his arm. "Here's a health to King William."

"Here's a health to King William," Ralph repeated. "I am sure I wish him no harm. And now with your permission I will be off."

The landlord led them to an outhouse in which were some trusses of straw. Just as he was about to leave them, Ralph said suddenly, "Ah! I had nearly forgotten about the priest. You have a priest here, have you not?"

"Of course," the landlord said. "Do you take us for heathens?"

"Not at all," Ralph said apologetically; "but father told me to call and pay him for some masses. My

eldest sister was very ill when we came away, and father worries about her. Where does the priest live?"

"The last house on the left as you go out from the farther end of the village. But any one will show you in in the morning. You don't want the light any longer?" For the boys had, while speaking, been taking off their boots and making a show of preparing to lie down on the straw.

"No, thank you. Good night. Oh, I forgot; what do you charge a cask for your best beer? Father wanted to know; and, if the price suits, will send down a cart to fetch it."

The landlord named the price, and then said good night, and left them.

When he returned to the room where he had left the German soldiers, the sergeant asked him a question or two concerning the boys, and the landlord repeated the substance of the conversation which he had just had. This allayed the last suspicions which had remained in the sergeant's mind, and he congratulated himself greatly that he had not taken his men out-in such a night upon a mere groundless suspicion.

"If the landlord repeats that yarn to the Germans it will allay all suspicion," Ralph said, when they were left alone, "otherwise the sergeant might have taken it into his head to come to have a look at us, and although it would not very much matter that he should discover that the birds had flown, still it would have put him on his guard, and he might have doubled the sentries, and made it much more difficult for us. We have had a very narrow squeak for it this time, Percy, old boy."

“Very, Ralph! I would rather go through twenty battles again than feel as I felt when I saw you start and thought that I should never see you again alive.”

“Well, we have no time to lose now, Percy. Have you got your boots on again? If so, let us start at once. The major and men must be very anxious long before this. It must be full an hour since we came in.”

“It has been the longest hour I ever passed, Ralph. There, now, I am ready if you are.”

“We must go out very quietly, Percy. I have no doubt that they have got sentries posted all about. They know that we are in the neighbourhood. I wish I knew how many there are of them.

“I found out from the landlord that all the fifteen men we saw here were billeted upon him,” Percy said. “He told me at first, when I asked him, that he could do nothing for me in the way of a bed, because there were three or four in every room. I said that a stable and a little straw would do for us very well, and then he thought of this outhouse. At the same rate there must be at least a hundred men in the village.”

They now opened the door of the outhouse, went quietly out, and made their way through a garden at the back of the house towards the wood.

“Stand still a few minutes, Percy,” Ralph said in a whisper, “and let us see if we can find out where the sentries are placed. I expect that they form a cordon round the village. Lie down by this wall, we can see them there, and they cannot see us.”

It was well that they did so, for in another minute they heard a tread quite close to them and a Prussian soldier

passed within a yard of where they were lying. They could dimly see that his hood was over his head, and hear that he was humming to himself a scrap of some German air. They lay there until he had again passed the spot, and then, having found out the direction of his beat, they crawled noiselessly away, and in five minutes had reached the edge of the forest. They did not enter it, as it would have been impossible in the dense darkness, to have made their way without running against trees, and snapping off boughs, which would have given the alarm. They therefore skirted the edge, knowing that, with the trees behind them, they would be invisible at the distance of a yard or two, and in ten minutes reached the place where their company was awaiting them. As they approached the spot they gave a short, low whistle, which was the agreed sign among the band for knowing each other on night expeditions. It was answered at once, and in another minute they were among their friends.

“What has happened?” Major Tempé asked. “We were getting very anxious about you. I sent Favarts to reconnoitre ten minutes ago, and he has just returned, saying that he can hear some one pacing backwards and forwards on the road, and that he believes it to be a sentry.”

“He was quite right,” Ralph said, “the village is full of Germans. There must, as far as we can see, be seventy or eighty of them at the very lowest, and there are probably a hundred. We have been prisoners, or something very like it, and have had a monstrosly close shave of it. But I will tell you all that when we

have time. Do you still think of carrying out your plans?"

"Certainly," Major Tempé said, "that schoolmaster I am determined to have, even if we fight our way in, and shoot him in bed. Have you found out where he lives?"

"No, sir; but we have found out where the priest lives; it is this end house, the end of the village, on the left-hand side as you come out."

"Are the sentries very close together?"

"They are pretty close, but not too close to prevent our crawling between them unobserved on such a night as this."

Major Tempé hesitated for a while. "It would be too hazardous," he said; "we know nothing of the ground over which we should have to crawl, and it would be hardly possible for thirty men, with our accoutrements and firearms, to crawl along without snapping sticks, or striking rifles against a stone and giving the alarm. No, the sentry at the entrance of the village must be silenced."

So saying, the commandant turned to the men who were standing round and explained briefly the purport of the whispered conversation which he had had with Ralph. He then chose two active young men, and told them to take off their cloaks, belts, and accoutrements of all kinds, and to leave them with their rifles with the men who were to remain at the spot at which they then were, to cover their retreat if necessary. They were to take nothing with them but their sword-bayonets, which were not to be used except in case of necessity, and a coil of

light rope. Definite instructions were given them as to the manner in which their attack was to be made. They then took off their boots, and set off noiselessly upon their enterprise. They went on rapidly, until they were within plain hearing of the footsteps of the sentinel, and then very cautiously, and crouching almost to the ground, so as not to bring their bodies on a level with his eye, they crept up foot by foot to the end of his beat; here they waited a short time, while he passed and repassed them, unthinking of the deadly foe who, had they stretched out their hands, could have touched his cloak as he went past them.

At last, the second time he passed them on his way towards the village, they rose together behind him. In an instant one had garotted him with a choking grip that almost strangled him, and prevented him uttering the slightest sound, while the other grasped his rifle by the lock so as to prevent the possibility of its being fired. In another instant the rifle was torn from the grasp of the almost stupefied man, cords were passed tightly round his arms and legs, a handkerchief was thrust into his mouth, and fastened there by a cord going across the mouth and tied behind the head, and before the bewildered man fairly knew what had happened, he was lying bound and gagged by the roadside. One of the franc-tireurs now ran back to tell the Commandant that the men could advance; while the other, selected specially because he understood a little German, put on the spiked helmet of the captured sentry, and began to walk up and down in readiness to repeat the cry of "All well," should it be passed round.

The whole company were now moved up. Ten men were left at the point where the sentry was posted to cover a retreat, or to assist the sentry in case of any party coming out to relieve guard, and so discovering the change which had taken place. The others, led by the Commandant, proceeded forward until opposite the priest's house, in which lights were still burning, for it was not as yet ten o'clock. Major Tempé, accompanied only by two men and by Ralph Barclay to interpret, if necessary, now went cautiously up to the house.

The light was in a room on the ground floor. To this Major Tempé advanced, and, looking in, saw the priest sitting reading alone. He tapped very gently at the window, and the priest, looking up, gave a start upon seeing an armed man looking in at the window. Major Tempé put his finger to his lips to enforce the necessity for silence, and made signs to him to open the window. After a moment's hesitation the priest rose from his seat, came to the window, and unfastened it, taking great precautions against noise.

"Are you French?" he asked in a whisper.

"Yes; a commandant of franc-tireurs."

"Hush, then, for your life," the priest said earnestly. "The village is full of Prussians. The officer, with a soldier as his servant, is upstairs. He arrived in a state of fever, and is to-night quite ill. The soldier is up with him. I believe the sergeant, who is at the inn, is in command for to-night. A soldier was despatched this evening to ask for another officer to be sent out. What can I do for you?"

"I only want you to tell me in which house the

schoolmaster lives. He is a traitor, and has betrayed us to the Prussians. It is owing to him that they are here."

"He has a bad name in the village," the priest said, "and we had applied to have him removed. He lives in the third house from here on the same side of the road."

"Has he any Germans quartered upon him?"

"Twenty or thirty men," the priest said; "the school-room is full of them."

"Do you know which is his room?" Major Tempé asked. "It would be a great thing if we could get at him without alarming the enemy. I have thirty men here, but I do not want to have a fight in the village if I can help it."

"I know his house," the priest said. "The school-room is at the side of the house, and his sitting-room and kitchen on the ground floor of the house itself. There are three bedrooms over: his room is in front of the house to the right as you face it."

"Thank you," Major Tempé said. "Have you a ladder?"

"There is one lying on the ground by the wall to the left. I hope you do not intend to shed blood?"

"No," Major Tempé said grimly. "I think that I can promise that there will be no blood shed—that is to say, unless we are attacked by the Prussians. Good night, and thank you. I need not say that for your own sake you will not mention in the morning having seen us."

The Commandant now rejoined his party, and they

advanced to the house indicated. He then chose ten men to accompany him, ordering the rest to remain at a distance of twenty yards, with their rifles cocked, and in readiness for instant action. The ladder was then brought forward by the men selected, and placed against the window. Major Tempé had before starting provided himself from the carpenter of the village with an auger, a small and fine saw, a bottle of oil, and a thin strip of straight iron. He now mounted the ladder, and after carefully examining the window, which was of the make which we call in England latticed, he inserted the strip of iron, and tried to force back the fastening. This he failed in doing, being afraid to use much force lest the fastening should give suddenly with a crash. He had, however, ascertained the exact position of the fastening. Having before mounting carefully oiled the auger and saw, he now applied the former, and made a hole through the framework at the junction of the two sides of the window just above the fastening. Introducing the saw into this hole, he noiselessly cut entirely round the fastening with a semi-circular sweep to the junction of the window below it, and as he did so the window swung partially open by its own weight. He now descended the ladder again, took off his boots, and ordered two of the men to do the same, and to put aside all arms and accoutrements that could strike against any thing and make a noise. Then taking a coil of strong rope in his hand, and followed by the two men, he again mounted the ladder. The instructions to the men were that one was to enter at once with him, the other to remain where he was until he received the signal.

The major entered the room noiselessly, and dropped at once on to his hands and knees, and was, a minute after, joined by his follower. He now crawled forward, groping his way with the greatest caution, so as to make no noise until he found the bed. Then rising to his feet he threw himself upon the sleeping man, and in a moment had him tightly by the throat with one hand while the other was placed firmly on his mouth. Paralyzed by the suddenness of the attack, and with his arms tightly kept down by the bedclothes and the weight of his assailant, the schoolmaster was unable to struggle.

“Now light the light,” Major Tempé said quietly.

His follower at once struck one of the noiseless German matches which are used almost exclusively in these parts of France, and lighted a lamp which was standing upon the table. He then came up to the bed and assisted the major to securely gag and bind the prisoner, whose looks, when he saw into whose hands he had fallen, betokened the wildest terror.

“Search his pockets,” Major Tempé said, “we may find something of importance.”

In the breast-pocket of his coat was a pocket-book, and in it among the papers was a letter from the colonel commanding at Saverne, which had evidently been brought to him by the officer of the detachment that morning, telling him to come down to Saverne on the following evening to guide the troops to the village in which the franc-tireurs were stationed. The letter also enclosed ten hundred-thaler notes¹

“They are part of our blood money,” the major said

¹ A thaler is about equal to two shillings.

grimly. "Bring them away, they are the fair spoil of war. Tell Barré to come in."

The man on the ladder now joined them, and together they quietly lifted the schoolmaster, and carried him to the window. They then fastened a rope round the prisoner's body, lifted him out on to the ladder and lowered him gradually down to the men below. They now blew out the light and descended the ladder. The two men who had waited at its foot raised the prisoner on their shoulders and carried him off to their comrades, while the commandant and the other two men hastily put on their boots, seized their arms and accoutrements, and in two minutes the whole party were marching quietly down the village.

No incident whatever marked their retreat. The sentry had been undisturbed during their absence, and in a few minutes the whole party were out of the village without the slightest alarm having been raised.

They followed the road by which they had come for about a mile and then turned off a side-path in the forest to the left. They followed this for a short distance only into the forest, and then, when they arrived at a small open space, a halt was ordered. The prisoner was dropped unceremoniously to the ground by the two franc-tireurs who carried him on their shoulders, and a fire was speedily lighted.

Major Tempé then ordered the prisoner to be unbound and ungagged, and, with a guard upon either side of him, to be placed in front of the company drawn up in a semicircle by the fire. The prisoner was a man of about fifty-five, with a sallow, cunning face. He could scarcely

stand, and indeed would have sunk on his knees in his abject terror had not the guards by his side held him by the arms.

“Men,” Major Tempé said, “undoubted as the guilt of the prisoner appeared to be, we had got no absolute proof, and a mistake might have been possible as to the name of the village whose schoolmaster had betrayed us. This letter found in his coat-pocket, and this German money, the price of our blood, leave no further doubt possible.” And here the major read the Prussian colonel’s letter. “Are you still of opinion that he merits death?”

“Yes, yes,” the men exclaimed unanimously.

“Prisoner,” Major Tempé said, “you have heard your sentence. You are a convicted traitor, convicted of having betrayed your country, convicted of having sold the blood of your countrymen. I give you five minutes to ask that pardon of God which you cannot obtain from man.”

The miserable wretch gave a cry of terror and fell on his knees, and would have crawled towards his judge to beg for mercy had not his guard restrained him. For the next five minutes the forest rang with alternate cries, entreaties, threats, and curses, so horrible, that the four boys and several of the younger men put their hands to their ears and walked away so as not to see or hear the terrible punishment. At the end of that time there was a brief struggle and then a deep silence, and the body of the traitor swung from a branch of one of the trees, with a paper pinned on his breast, “So perish all traitors.”

“Louis Duburg,” Major Tempé said, “take this paper

with 'Those who seek a traitor will find him here,' and fasten it to a tree, so that it may be seen at the point where this path turned from the road."

Louis took it and ran off. In a quarter of an hour, when he returned, he found the company drawn up in readiness to march; he fell in at once, and the troop moved off, leaving behind them the smouldering fire, and the white figure swinging near it.





CHAPTER IX.

A DESPERATE FIGHT.

DAYLIGHT was just breaking when Major Tempé marched with his men into Marmontier, at which place the other three companies had arrived the night previously. It was a large village, the chief place of its canton, and the corps was most hospitably received by the inhabitants. Had they arrived the evening before it would have been impossible to provide them all with beds, and they would have been obliged, like the majority of their comrades, to sleep on straw in the school-room. The inhabitants, however, were up and about very shortly after the arrival of Major Tempé's command, and his men were soon provided for in the beds which they had left.

Beds were now a luxury indeed, as the corps had not slept in them since they had been quartered at Baccarat, two nights before their first encounter with the Prussians near Blamont. It was with great unwillingness, then, that they turned out when the bugle sounded at two

o'clock in the afternoon. They partook of a hearty meal, provided by the people upon whom they were quartered, and an hour later the whole corps marched out towards Wasselonne, a small town situated on the Breuche, a little river which, winding round by Molsheim, falls into the Rhine at Strasburg. A branch line of railroad terminates at this place. When they arrived within three miles of it they turned off to the right, for Wasselonne had frequently been visited by the Prussians, and slept at the little village of Casswiller, at the edge of the forest of Edenwald. Another day's short but weary marching over the mountains brought them to the village of Still, lying high upon the western slope of the Vosges above Mutzig.

From this point they had a splendid view over the valley of the Rhine. From their feet at Mutzig the railway ran through Molsheim straight across the country to Strasburg, the beautiful spire of whose cathedral rose above the flats at a distance of about fifteen miles. The day happened to be a quiet one, and the deep booming of the guns of the besiegers could be distinctly heard.

The inhabitants reported that the German troops patrolled the whole valley, pushing sometimes down to the walls of Schlestadt, levying contributions and carrying off cattle. The village was very poor, and was able to furnish little accommodations in the way of quarters, still less in that of food. Six of the villagers were therefore sent through the forest of Edenwald to Raon with an order to fetch over two oxen and thirty sheep of those left there in charge of the head man of the village. They returned in three days, Raon being only about fifteen

miles east of Still. The corps was now broken up into its four companies, who were stationed in the villages on the Vosges, and at the edge of the forest of Trieswald and Bar, the first company remaining at Still. From these villages they commanded a view over the whole plain, and could, with the aid of glasses, distinctly see any bodies of men going south from Strasburg. Each company was to act independently of the other, uniting their forces only when ordered to do so by Major Tempé, who took up his headquarters with the second company, that having the most central position. Each company was to keep a sharp watch over the country, to attack any body of the enemy not superior to themselves in force, and to cut off, if possible, any small parties pillaging in the villages of the valley near the foot of the mountains.

The first company, under their Lieutenant De Maupas, turned their special attention to Mutzig, which was not, they learned, actually occupied by the Germans, but which was frequently visited by parties from Molsheim, where a portion of the army of the besiegers was stationed. The young Barclays, their cousins, and Tim Doyle were quartered together in one of the largest houses in the village, and from thence a fine view over the plain was attainable.

They were not destined to remain long in inactivity. Upon the fourth day after their arrival they saw a party of some twenty horsemen approaching Mutzig. In five minutes every man had assembled, and at once rapidly marched down the hill, taking advantage of its irregularities so as to follow a track in which they would be invisible from the road. Making a long detour, they

gained the road about half a mile beyond Mutzig, and posting themselves among some trees by its side, awaited the return of the Uhlans.

It was upwards of two hours before they returned. They were laughing and singing, and the boys felt a sensation of repugnance as they raised their rifles to their shoulders and awaited the order to fire into their unsuspecting foes. They had not as yet become hardened to the horrors of war. As the word was given the rifles flashed out, and six of the horsemen fell, the rest, putting spurs to their horses, galloped furiously away. Molsheim was so close, and the enemy might come back again largely reinforced in so short a time, that the order was given to retreat at once.

Reaching the hill and looking back an hour later, they saw a dark mass coming from Molsheim, and the glasses soon made them out to be about a hundred cavalry and as many infantry. It was dark as they entered Mutzig, and although it was not probable that they would ascend the hill at night, sentries were thrown out far down its sides to give the alarm, and the men were ordered to hold themselves in readiness for an immediate retreat to the forest. It happened that none of the boys were on duty, and just as they were sitting down to dinner, Tim, who had been out to fetch some wood, came running in.

“Heavenly Mother, the brutes are setting fire to Mutzig, your honour.”

The boys ran out. Below a mass of red flame was rising, and it was evident that several houses were in flames. The sight was a grand one, for the light showed the outline of the slopes of the hills, and, reflected on the

roofs of the houses of the little town, made them look as if red hot. Out upon the plain round Molsheim were the scattered lights of innumerable camp-fires, while in the distance flickering flashes, like the play of summer lightning, told of the ceaseless rain of fire kept up upon the unhappy town of Strasburg.

“What a shame !” Percy said indignantly, “as if the inhabitants of Mutzig could help our attacking the Uhlans. Look, Ralph, there are six distinct fires.”

“I suppose that is one for each man we killed or wounded, Percy. You may be sure they will make them pay too. Thirty thousand francs, I should think, at least. War used to be looked upon as a chivalrous proceeding. There is no romance in German warfare. They call us a nation of shop-keepers, they make war themselves in the spirit of a nation of petty hucksterers.”

“What do you think of that, lads ?” Lieutenant de Maupas said, coming up to where they were standing.

“It is shameful, sir, shameful,” Ralph said.

“Yes,” the officer said gloomily. “This is to make war as the Vandals made it, not as it is made in the nineteenth century. In the Crimea, in Italy, ay, even in China, we did not make war in this way. In China we burnt the Emperor’s summer palace because his soldiers had murdered our prisoners in cold blood, but we did not burn a single village.”

“No,” Ralph said, “and I have read that in Abyssinia we never as much as took a fowl or a bundle of grass from the natives without paying for it, and we only burned the fortress of Magdala after offering it in succession to the various kings of the country, and destroyed it at last

to prevent it becoming a stronghold of the Gallas, the enemies of Abyssinia. Don't you think," he asked, after a pause, "we shall have fighting to-morrow, sir?"

"I think it very likely indeed," the lieutenant said. "I have just sent off a messenger to the commandant with a full report, and asked him to send over a reply whether he will come to our assistance, or if we are to fall back."

"Faith, and I hope that its not falling back we'll be till after we've had the satisfaction of spaking to them a bit," Tim Doyle put in. "Barring the little affair of to-day, which isn't worth mentioning, I haven't had a chance of a skrimage since I joined the corps. It's been jist marching and counter-marching over the most onraisonable country, nothing but up hill and down hill and through trees, with big stones breaking our poor feet into pieces, and the rain running down us fit to give us the ague. Sure, lieutenant, ye won't be for marching us away till we've had a little divarshin?"

The boys all laughed at Tim's complaint, which had been delivered in English, for although he could now understand French, he never attempted to speak it except to ask some necessary question. Percy translated it to the lieutenant.

"You will have fighting enough before you have done, Tim. Whether you will have it to-morrow I don't know. There are a hundred infantry—they can't use their cavalry—and we are only twenty-six men, all told. Fortunately we have a strong line of retreat, or I should not even wait for the chance of being attacked."

"At any rate you think that we are safe until morning, sir?"

"Yes, I think so," the lieutenant said.

"Then we will go in to our dinner," Ralph said.
"Who knows where we may dine to-morrow?"

Day was just beginning to break when Percy Barclay started up in his bed. He listened for an instant and heard the crack of a rifle.

"Up, Ralph ; up all of you," he shouted. "We are attacked."

The others were on their feet in an instant. None of them had thought of undressing, and as they seized their arms and equipments, the whistle of Lieutenant de Maupas sounded loud and shrill. As they issued out there was already a scene of bustle and confusion in the village. The franc-tireurs were rushing from the doors ; the villagers were also pouring out, women were screaming and men swearing.

"You had better drive off your animals up into the forest, and carry off whatever you can of value, and send the women and children off at once," De Maupas shouted to the head man of the village. "We will give you as much time as we can, but if they are in full strength it will not be long. Now lads, forward. Don't throw away a shot. Take advantage of every possible cover and fall back as slowly and steadily as you can. The commandant will be here with the second company in half an hour. I had a message from him late last night."

The men advanced at once at the double, and in an instant had a view of what was going on. The six men out as sentries were falling back rapidly towards the village, and two dark bodies of infantry were approaching abreast of each other, but at a distance of two or three

hundred yards apart. They were some five hundred yards beyond the retreating sentries, who were themselves a few hundred yards below the village. The enemy had at present made no reply whatever to the fire of the sentries.

“Advance slowly in skirmishing order,” De Maupas said. “One flank of the company oppose each column, open fire at once, sight for seven hundred yards, take advantage of cover, and fire steadily.”

A steady fire was at once opened, and although its effects could not be perceived, they were evidently sensible, for the columns immediately threw out half their strength as skirmishers and opened fire. In a hundred paces De Maupas halted his men, and told them to lie down behind shelter. The enemy were now five hundred yards off, and the franc-tireurs had been joined by the sentries. The numbers were four to one, and although the position was of considerable advantage to the smaller force, as well as the fact that they were lying quiet in shelter, while their adversaries had to fire as they advanced, the odds were far too great to hope for success. Every moment, however, it was getting lighter, and the franc-tireurs could see that their fire was doing considerable execution, whereas only two of their men had received slight wounds. The enemy, however, pushed on steadily, and were now little more than three hundred yards distant.

“Fall back,” the lieutenant shouted; “six men alternately of each half company. Back fifty paces at the double!”

At the word twelve men retreated at full speed for fifty yards, the others redoubling the fire from their

breechloaders to cover the retreat. The instant that the first men had gone fifty yards they turned, threw themselves upon the ground, and opened fire, while those in front ran back at full speed, passed them, and halted in turn fifty paces in the rear. The manœuvre was repeated three times, and they then gained the end house of the village.

Under shelter of a low wall another stand was made, but the superior force of the enemy enabled them to threaten to outflank them. Many of the Germans had fallen, but the rest advanced with as much coolness and precision as if on parade. "How beautifully these fellows do fight!" Ralph exclaimed in admiration.

"Now, lads, we must retreat," the lieutenant said. "We have done very well. Now across the village, and then make for the forest as hard as you can; it's not over five hundred yards. When you are once there make a stand again."

The men turned, and in another moment would have carried out the order, when from a house in a line with them, but about fifty yards off, a heavy fire of musketry suddenly broke out.

"Hurrah, lads, there's the Commandant. Stand to your wall; we'll thrash them yet."

Staggered by this sudden and heavy fire, the Germans paused, and then fell back to a spot where a dip in the ground sheltered them from the fire from above. For a short time there was a cessation of the fight. At this moment the Commandant joined the first company.

"Well done indeed!" he exclaimed; "gallantly done, lads! We heard the firing, and feared you would be

crushed before we could get up. It is fortunate I started half an hour before daybreak. We have done the last two miles at a run. Have you suffered much?"

There was a general look round. Four men had fallen in the retreat; another lay dead, shot through the head as he fired over the wall; four others were wounded, three seriously; while Ralph Barclay had a ball through the fleshy part of his arm.

"Fortunately," Major Tempé said, "half-a-dozen men from the other village volunteered to come over to help the wounded. I will send them over here at once. They can take some doors off their hinges, and carry these three men right back into the forest at once. We have not done yet. Get your men into skirmishing line, De Maupas. I will form mine to join you. Occupy the line of gardens and walls."

Scarcely was the movement effected when the Germans again appeared on the hill-side. They had still a very great superiority in numbers, for the two companies of franc-tireurs only numbered now forty-five men, while the Germans, who had lost upwards of twenty men, were still nearly eighty strong. Ralph Barclay still kept his place in the ranks. Tim Doyle had bandaged up his arm, for Percy, who had at first attempted it, had nearly fainted at the sight of the blood. The Irishman was in the highest glee, and occasionally indulged in whoops of defiance, and in taunting remarks, which would not have flattered the enemy, could they have heard and understood them.

The Germans, as they emerged from their shelter, were about four hundred yards distant, and the fire at once

recommenced. The franc-tireurs were all lying down, and this gave them a great advantage over the Germans ; and the disparity of numbers being less, the fight raged with greater obstinacy than before. Very gradually the enemy won their way, taking advantage of every rock and inequality of ground, until they were within two hundred yards of the village. Nearer than this they could not come, for the ground was open, and in the face of the force in shelter, armed with breechloaders, it would have been madness to have attempted a rush. For some time the combatants remained in the same position, merely exchanging an occasional shot when a head or a hat was exposed. At last Major Tempé became uneasy at the prolonged inaction upon the part of the enemy.

“De Maupas,” he said, “run up to the upper story of that house, and try and see what they are doing. Look all round. I don’t like this long hesitation. They are greatly superior in force, and know it. I think that they must be going to try some flanking movement.”

The lieutenant obeyed, and going up to the upper story of the house pointed out by his commander, peered cautiously out. As far as he could see nothing was stirring ; the Germans appeared to be lying in the little hollow in which they were sheltered. He was about to descend when he remembered his orders to look around in all directions. He therefore went to a window at the end of the house and looked carefully out. As he did so he gave a start, and his heart seemed for a moment to stand still. Then with a bound he reached the door, sprang down stairs, and rushed out to where Major Tempé was standing behind a wall.

"The cavalry are upon us," he said. "They are not five hundred yards off. They have made a great detour and are——"

Major Tempé stopped to hear no more.

"Fall back, men," he shouted. "Keep well together. The cavalry are upon us. Now at a double to the forest for your lives. Steady, steady."

The men sprang from the position behind which they had been firing, fell in hurriedly in the street, and then, went off at a fast double towards the forest. There were a few trees near, but no shelter sufficient to be of any use nearer than five hundred yards. Fortunately they were unimpeded by wounded, every man having been carried back into the forest immediately he was struck. Still it was evident that they could not gain the forest in time. They had seen the leading horsemen turn into the end of the village not more than three hundred yards distant as they started, and the carbine-balls were already whizzing over their heads.

With the rapidity and steadiness which mark the movements of the Prussian cavalry, they formed in line as they issued from the village, and before the fugitives were half way to the forest a line of horsemen fifty abreast were in full gallop behind. Then followed another of equal strength fifty yards behind. The franc-tireurs, with their rifles and accoutrements, were already slackening their speed.

"We must form square, major; they are not a hundred and fifty yards behind," De Maupas exclaimed. "We can beat them off easily enough."

Major Tempé shook his head, and shouted cheerily,



The Fight in the Wood.—Page 145.

“Keep on to the last moment, men, well together ; I will tell you when the moment is come ; hold your rifles in readiness.”

In ten more seconds he gave the word. The men were in readiness, and the square was formed as if by magic. The Uhlans were not more than eighty yards off.

“File firing,” the major shouted. “Steady ! don’t throw away a shot.”

Now was the time for breech-loading weapons, and so deadly was the fire that the centre of the Prussian line melted away before it, and the men who remained reined aside their horses as they reached the hedge of bayonets. The flanks kept on and united again behind the square, drawing up near the edge of the wood, a hundred and fifty yards distant.

The charge of the second line was attended with precisely similar results. The instant that they had passed, however, Major Tempé shouted to his men,

“On again for the woods. Steady ; keep square ; reserve your fire till I tell you ; we must break through the cavalry ; they only want to keep us ; their infantry will be here in three minutes, they are through the village already.”

The position of the franc-tireurs was now critical in the extreme. The enemy’s cavalry, between them and safety, only a hundred yards distant, had unslung their carbines and opened fire. The infantry were nearly two hundred yards behind, but fortunately dared not fire for fear of hitting their own cavalry.

At a rapid pace, for they were running for life, the little knot of franc-tireurs dashed forward. One or two fell

from the fire of the cavalry, and as they were fifty yards distant from the wood there was a cry and Philippe Duburg fell to the ground. In an instant Tim Doyle, who was his next man, stopped, caught him up as if he had been a feather, and with a desperate effort again joined the others just as they were within twenty yards of the cavalry.

“Fire!” Major Tempé cried; and from the front and from each side of the little square, which was but six deep either way, the rifles flashed out.

“Level bayonets; charge!” There was a short struggle, the second ranks poured their fire into the cavalry line; there was a clashing of bayonets against swords, and then the band ran through the broken line of cavalry. There was a rush into the brushwood, and then from behind the shelter of the trees the fire opened again, and the cavalry fell sullenly back, having lost upwards of thirty men in that short five minutes since they had left the village. The German infantry halted at a distance of two hundred yards, but they would have lost too many men in crossing the open to make it worth while to attack the sheltered foe, who could pick them off to the last moment only to withdraw deeper into the forest when they approached its edge. Accordingly they too fell back, exchanging fire with the franc-tireurs until they gained the shelter of the village.

The conflict over, the men sank exhausted upon the ground where they stood.

Major Tempé went round to each, saying a word of praise, and giving a little of the brandy with which he had filled his canteen before starting, with some water

from their own kegs. Then he gave a sharp whistle, and the men again gathered round him. "Once more, lads, I must thank you for your conduct," he said. "You have defended yourselves against forces altogether four times your own. You fairly kept at bay an infantry force of twice your own number. You have withstood a charge of cavalry also double your own strength, and have performed the unusual feat of successfully charging cavalry. You have inflicted a very heavy loss upon the enemy. Not less than forty of the infantry must have been placed *hors de combat*, and fifteen or twenty of the cavalry at the lowest estimate. Altogether, although forced to fall back, the affair is more creditable than many a brilliant victory. Our own loss has been heavy—as heavy, in proportion to our numbers, as that of the enemy—though, owing to an advantage of position while engaged with the infantry, it is actually far less than theirs. Still, lads, it is very, very heavy," and the Major looked round with a saddened face on the diminished band. "Our only consolation is that our friends have died doing their duty, and setting a noble example. If all Frenchmen were but animated with a spirit like that which I am proud to say animates the franc-tireurs of Dijon, there are few of the invaders who would ever recross the Rhine. Lieutenant Ribouville, go through the muster-roll of the two companies; our brave friend, De Maupas, has, alas! fallen. He was at my side when a rifle ball struck him in the temple."

The list was now called over, and the result was a sad one. The two companies, including officers, had gone into the fight fifty-five strong. Only thirty-one answered

to their names. Besides these, eight had been removed farther into the forest severely wounded, and Philippe Duburg lay a short distance off, the surgeon being employed bandaging his leg which a rifle ball had entered above the knee. Fifteen, therefore, were dead or missing, which, as the Germans bayoneted all wounded franc-tireurs, was the same thing. Of the thirty-one who answered to their names, nine had wounds more or less severe, and the surgeon, with his assistants, had work on his hand which would take him far into the night.

The instant that they were dismissed from parade, the boys hurried to their cousin. He was very pale from loss of blood, but was perfectly sensible. His brother sat on a bench beside him, holding his head on his knee.

Philippe smiled faintly as the boys came up. "I am so glad you have escaped," he said in a low voice.

They clasped his hand. "Does it hurt you much, Philippe?"

"Not very much; not so much as I should have thought."

"Did the doctor say anything about it, Philippe?"

"Yes, he said that it had just missed the great arteries, and that he thinks it struck the bone and has glanced up somewhere, but he can't say till he probes it, when ——"

"Then your leg is not broken?"

"No, he says it is certainly not broken, but it may be splintered."

"Thank God for that, anyhow," the boys said.

"We owe his life to Tim Doyle," Louis said. "I was

not next to him, and did not see him fall or know he was hit till I saw Tim come up with him on his shoulders, and even if I had, I could not have lifted him and carried him off. Tim saved his life ; there is no doubt about that."

As it was evident that Philippe was too weak to talk, and would be better for being quiet awhile, the boys now left him with his brother.

Looking through the trees towards the village, a dense smoke could now be seen rising in several places, and in a few minutes the whole village was in a blaze. Moved by the sight, the unfortunate inhabitants came out from their hiding-places in the forest, wringing their hands, crying, and cursing the invaders.

In spite of the advice of Major Tempé, several of the women went off towards the scene of conflagration to endeavour to save some little household treasure from the flames. In a short time one of them returned to fetch her husband, saying that the enemy had all left before they reached the village, and were already far down the hill-side. Major Tempé at once sent forward the unwounded men to assist the villagers to put out the fire, and to save property. Their efforts were, however, altogether unavailing : the Germans had scattered large quantities of petroleum before leaving upon the beds and such other furniture as they could not carry away or destroy.

It was a pitiable sight to see the poor homeless people sitting about looking at the ruins of their houses. Some cried piteously, others gazed with listless faces, but with a cold despair even more painful to see. Fortunately, they had saved all their animals, but at present they were

too much absorbed in the thoughts of what they had lost to bestow even a thought of satisfaction on what they had saved.

Major Tempé, grieved and touched at the painful scene of which he and his men had been the cause, called the franc-tireurs together, and made a proposition to them, which was at once heartily agreed to. He then called together the curé and schoolmaster, and after a few well-chosen words of regret at the ills which he and his had involuntarily brought upon the village, he handed over to them, in the name of the whole corps, the hundred pounds in thaler notes which had been found upon the schoolmaster whom they had executed for treachery, to be distributed among the inhabitants according to their necessities. The offer was gratefully received, and the priest and schoolmaster at once went round and told the poor people, whose gratitude and delight were unbounded.

To so poor a population the sum seemed immense ; and although it would not replace what was destroyed, it would go far towards making their abodes habitable. The village only contained about twenty houses. The walls were still standing. Timber for the roofs and floors was to be had for cutting in the forest. Bushes for thatching could be found in abundance. The principal portion of the houses, therefore, would cost only labour ; and this money would suffice to keep them alive while engaged upon it ; and enough would remain to get at least a few blankets to lay upon the straw, which would for the time serve for beds, together with a few other simple necessaries. The sale of a portion of the animals

would do the rest ; and in their gratitude to the franc-tireurs for having thus relieved their first and most pressing difficulties, the inhabitants altogether forgot the ill-feeling which they had before felt against them as the authors of their disaster.

After burying their dead, the men set to work to assist the villagers in building temporary huts, or rather bowers, to the edge of the forest, in which, before night-fall, they had the satisfaction of seeing them installed. The few articles of bedding, blankets, &c., saved at the approach of the Prussians, were spread on heaps of freshly-cut grass ; and one of the oxen of the franc-tireurs, which had arrived the day before, was killed and divided. Great fires were lighted ; and, had it not been for the bandages on the heads, and the arms in slings, of several of the franc-tireurs, no one coming upon the scene would have guessed how desperate a skirmish had raged here.

The next day the carts which had been sent for arrived, and the wounded were placed in them upon heaps of straw, and sent off with one of the surgeons, with instructions to travel among the hills, until they reached a point where it would be quite safe to descend into the valley, and take the train to Dijon at the first station at which it was open. Among them was Philippe Duburg, who was accompanied by his brother. Louis had obtained a week's leave of absence for the purpose, and was the bearer of letters and innumerable messages from the boys to their parents and sisters. A few hours later the remnants of the first and second companies marched to join their comrades.



CHAPTER X.

THE BRIDGE OF THE VESOUZE.

THE very day after the fight news arrived which induced a sudden change of position. Upon the 16th of September the Baden troops occupied Mulhouse, having entered Colmar on the preceding day. It was evident that the railway was so strongly guarded between Strasburg and Nancy, that it was hopeless to expect to be able to interrupt it seriously with so small a force as that at Major Tempé's command, still less possible was it to render any assistance whatever to the doomed city of Strasburg. After taking council, therefore, with his officers, Major Tempé decided to march more to the south, so as to assist to oppose the passage of the enemy west from Colmar or Mulhouse through the passes of the Vosges. The alarm was, however, but temporary, for, having made requisitions as usual, the Prussians retired, and the corps returned to their old quarters. There another ten days passed: spent not in ease, but in constant marchings and counter-marchings.

Whenever news arrived that any parties of Uhlans were approaching the mountains with the object of making requisitions, the corps were instantly set in motion. Sometimes severe skirmishes were the result, sometimes the news turned out to be untrue, and after a long day's march and a night spent in watching, the men had nothing to do but to march back again. Upon the 28th came the news of the surrender of Strasburg upon the preceding day, after one of the most heroic defences in history. There was now no doubt that the Germans would ere long advance seriously.

By this time the total of the French forces among the Vosges mountains was considerable. Scarce a day passed without the arrival of a corps of franc-tireurs, and had all these corps been animated with a spirit such as that evinced by the franc-tireurs of Dijon, and had they acted in unity, with discipline and intelligence, they might have rendered immense services to France. Unfortunately this was very far from being the case. Very many of the men had entered the ranks only to avoid being called upon to go out with the Mobiles or mobilized National Guard ; others had only entered from the impulse of the moment. Very many were altogether unwilling to submit to any steady discipline, while in a great number of cases the corps were completely paralyzed from the utter incapacity of their officers. Owing to these various causes the corps of franc-tireurs distinguished themselves in a great number of cases only by the extreme ingenuity and foresight which they displayed in keeping at a prudent distance from the enemy. Some, too, earned a bad name not only for themselves but for the whole body of

franc-tireurs by their conduct towards the villagers, helping themselves freely to what they required, and making themselves almost as much dreaded by the peasantry as even the Germans themselves.

At the same time the villagers had in very many cases only themselves to blame for the rough measures adopted by the franc-tireurs, for often, instead of doing all in their power for the men who had taken up arms in the cause of France, the villagers looked upon them only as strangers out of whom the richest possible harvest was to be obtained, and charged the most exorbitant prices for all articles of necessity supplied to them. In fact, they sometimes did not hesitate to say that they would not provide them at any price with the provisions required, as these would be wanted to satisfy the requisition of the Germans upon their arrival.

Perhaps in the whole world there is no class of people so completely engrossed by the thought of gain as are the French bourgeois and rustic population. Every change of government, every political alteration, every law passed, is regarded by them simply and solely from the view of how it will affect their own pockets. Thus, instead of driving away their flocks and herds at the approach of the invaders, the people remained quietly in their houses, and shamelessly trafficked with the invaders. This apathy, faintheartedness, and want of patriotism upon the part of the inhabitants of the small towns and villages caused innumerable difficulties to the franc-tireurs, and Major Tempé was sometimes obliged to take the law into his own hands when the villagers absolutely refused to sell provisions or to give quarters to his men. In these cases

he summoned the priest, the schoolmaster, and two other head men of the place, and formed a committee with them and his own officers. These fixed a fair price upon the articles required, and Major Tempé then sent round a notice to the effect that if these articles were furnished in two hours they would be paid for at the agreed rates, but that if not furnished, he should quarter his men upon the inhabitants in accordance with the size of their houses and should remain there at least a week—a threat that never failed in producing the required effect. It was but seldom, however, that the major encountered any difficulties of this sort. The corps was for the most part composed of men with some money. They had now, too, sold the sheep and cattle which they had captured at Blamont, finding the inconvenience of sending for them whenever meat was required. The proceeds of these and of the horses captured at the same time had given them a fair sum in their regimental chest, and they were therefore able and willing to pay a fair sum for such articles as they required. Besides this, the report of the actions of Blamont and Still had now widely circulated, and, as a general thing, the people were glad to do all in their power for a corps composed of men who really meant work, and had given good proofs of their courage and energy.

By this time the boys had received several letters from home, and it may be readily imagined the pleasure these letters afforded them. Major Tempé's official report of the doings of his corps had been published in the Dijon papers, and from these had been copied far and wide through France, and the people of Dijon were not a little

proud of their corps. The names of the two Barclays had appeared in the report as specially distinguishing themselves, and their father had written saying how pleased and gratified he was at their conduct. Mrs. Barclay and Milly had also written, but their expressions of pleasure were mingled with many hopes that the boys would not expose themselves unnecessarily.

The band had dwindled much in the month since they left Dijon. Upwards of thirty had been killed or disabled in the fights of Blamont and Still. Half as many more had been killed or wounded in smaller skirmishes, and ten or twelve had gone home or into hospital completely knocked up with the hard work and exposure. Only about sixty men therefore remained.

Schlestadt and Neu Brisach were now invested by the Germans, and after waiting for a few days to ascertain the course that they were likely to take, Major Tempé determined (as General Cambriel was forming an army down by Besançon) to defend the upper passes of the Vosges, and as it was rumoured that a second German army was likely to advance south from Nancy, that he would recross the Vosges and aid in the defence against this second army of invaders.

Three days' fatiguing marches brought them to Epinal, where the boys, in accordance with their promise, went straight to the house of the gentleman who had so hospitably served them at their last visit. Their friends were delighted to see them, and expressed great regret that one of the party was missing. The boys were, however, able to say that their last letter from Dijon had given good accounts of Philippe Duburg, who was now considered out

of danger ; there was, however, no hope of his being able to rejoin them, as the surgeons considered it probable that his leg would be a very long time before it would be sufficiently healed to allow him to use it. Their host had read the account in the papers of the doings of the franc-tireurs, and his wife laughingly made a further apology to the Barclays and their cousin for her remark at their first visit about boys.

“My girls have talked about nothing else but your doings ever since we had the news of your attack upon the Uhlands near Blamont,” she said. “One would think, from the interest they take in the corps, that the whole future of France depended upon the franc-tireurs of Dijon.”

The young Barclays laughed, and Percy muttered something under his breath, while Louis Duburg replied seriously that he hoped that the franc-tireurs of Dijon would always do their best to deserve the kind thoughts of mademoiselles, at which piece of politeness Percy muttered “bosh.”

Epinal had as yet escaped, but it was feared that ere long the enemy would advance. The town looked deserted, for all the young men had left with the Mobiles or mobilized National Guards, and all men under forty were drilling in readiness to march at a moment's notice. No serious movement of the enemy south of Luneville was as yet signaled.

After two days' rest the corps again marched north, their destination being kept a profound secret even from the men. So anxious apparently was Major Tempé that this time their object should not be foiled by treachery, that after the first day's march he left the main road, and

having secured the services of a peasant as a guide, he made two long days' marches through forests and over mountains, avoiding even small villages. Four led horses accompanied the march, one laden with the gun cotton, and the other three carrying provisions so that they might be independent of the local supply. Each night they bivouacked in the forests, but as the weather was now fine, although the nights were cold, this was no hardship whatever. Upon the morning of the fourth day from their leaving Epinal, Major Tempé told his men that he had learned at Epinal that the line was no longer so closely guarded as before, the Germans being confident now of the impotence of the French to harm them, and that they were now in the forest of Moudan, within three miles of the railway between Luneville and Rechicourt, on the line to Strasbourg. His intention was to reconnoitre that day, and, if success should be found possible, to attempt at daybreak next morning to blow up the railway bridge over the Vesouze.

The news was received with great satisfaction, as the corps were burning to distinguish themselves, and in no way could they do such service as to cut the line of communication, although, as the Germans were no longer dependent upon a single line, the advantage would not be of so signal a nature as it would have been could they have cut it at the time when they first made the attempt. The Barclays were naturally selected to reconnoitre, and as their change of clothes had been always, by Major Tempé's orders, carried on the baggage horse, they had no difficulty upon that score.

Their expedition was uneventful. At the village nearest

to the bridge they went in and bought some cheese and other articles, and after gaining all the information they were able without exciting attention, they made their way through broken ground to a point near enough to the bridge to enable them to reconnoitre it undiscovered. A sentry was posted at each end. At a cottage hard by were ten others, while there were twenty in the village they had just left. There were also sentries down the line, but these were far enough apart to render it certain that they could not muster in time to interfere seriously with the enterprise. With this information they returned to the forest.

A council of war was held, and it was decided that the news was satisfactory, and that the attack should take place at daybreak. Each man was instructed in the work he would have to perform. Lieutenant Houdin, with thirty men, was to surprise the German party in the village. The rest, having made a detour, to avoid the village, were to be in readiness to attack the posts near the bridge immediately a gun was fired in the village. The attack was to be made at daybreak. From the bridge to the nearest point where the forest was thick enough to afford a safe shelter was a distance of about two miles.

As soon as it became dark the camp fires were allowed to burn low, and shortly afterwards the whole corps, with the exception of the sentries, were sound asleep. At four o'clock they were roused and marched silently off in the appointed direction. By five o'clock each party was at its post, and for half an hour they lay in expectancy. The Barclays were with Major Tempé's party near the

bridge. Louis Duburg and Tim were with the party at the village.

The attack upon the village was to take place at half-past five, and never did moments appear so slow to the boys as those which passed as they awaited the signal. At last the silence was broken by the sharp crack of the rifle, followed by three or four others.

"There goes the Prussian sentry, and there is our reply," Major Tempé said. "Now, lads, forward!"

As he spoke, the sentry on the bridge fired his rifle, immediately this was repeated by the next sentry on the line, and the signal was taken up by each sentry until the sound died in the distance. As it had done so, the franc-tireurs had made a rush forwards. They were met by a straggling discharge from the Germans, as, half-asleep, they hurried out from the guard-room. This was answered by the fire of the franc-tireurs, who surrounded them. Five fell, and the others, surprised and panic-stricken, threw down their arms. They were instantly secured, and the bridge was at once seized. The firing still continued in the village, but in another five minutes it ceased, and shortly afterwards Louis Duburg ran up with the tidings that the village was taken. The Germans, surprised in their beds, had offered but a slight resistance. Four were killed, and sixteen taken prisoners; one franc-tireur only was slightly wounded.

"Take two men with you," Major Tempé said, "and escort those five prisoners to the village. Give them over to Lieutenant Houdin, and tell him to send them with the prisoners he has taken under charge of six men to the forest. Let their hands be tied behind their

backs, for we cannot spare a larger escort. Tell him to be sure that the escort are loaded and have fixed bayonets. Directly he has sent off the prisoners let him join me here with the rest of his force."

Lieutenant Ribouville now set to work to inspect the bridge, and ordered the men, who were provided with the necessary implements, to set to and dig a hole down to the crown of the principal arch. It was harder work than they had expected. The roadway was solid, the ballast pressed down very tightly, and the crown of the arch covered to a considerable depth with concrete. Only a few men could work at once, and after a half-hour's desperate labour the hole was nothing like far enough advanced to ensure the total destruction of the bridge upon the charge being fired. In the meantime the Prussian sentries were arriving from up and down the line, and, although not in sufficient force to attack, had opened fire from a distance.

"Don't you think that will do, Ribouville?" Major Tempé asked.

"No, sir," the other replied, "it might blow a hole through the top of the arch, but I hardly think that it would do so, its force would be spent upwards."

At this moment Ralph, who had done his spell of work, and had been down to the stream to get a drink of water, came running up.

"If you please, Lieutenant Ribouville, there is a hole right through the pier, just above the water's edge. It seems to have been left to let any water that gets into the pier from above make its escape. I should think that would do to hold the charge."

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"The very thing," Lieutenant Ribouville said, delightfully; "what a fool I was not to have looked to see if such a hole existed! Stop work, men, and carry the barrels down to the edge of the water."

The stream was not above waist deep, and the engineer officer immediately waded into it and examined the hole. He at once pronounced it to be admirably suited to the purpose. It did not, as Ralph had supposed, go straight through; but there were two holes, one upon each side of the pier, nearly at the same level, and each extending into the centre of the pier. The holes were about four inches square.

The barrels of gun-cotton were now hastily opened on the bank, and men waded out with the contents. Lieutenant Ribouville upon one side and Ralph upon the other took the cotton, and thrust it with long sticks into the ends of the hole. In five minutes the contents of the two barrels were safely lodged, the fuse inserted, and the operation of tamping or ramming in dry sand, earth, and stones, commenced. "Make haste!" Major Tempé shouted. "Their numbers are increasing fast. There are some fifteen or twenty on either side."

A brisk fire of rifles was now going on. The day had fairly broken, and the franc-tireurs, sheltered behind the parapet of the bridge on the bank of the river, were exchanging a lively fire with the enemy. Three-quarters of an hour had passed since the first shot was fired. Suddenly a distant boom was heard, followed in a few seconds by a slight whizzing noise, which grew rapidly into a loud scream, and in another moment there was an

explosion close to the bridge. The men all left off their work for an instant.

“And what may that be, Mister Percy? A more unpleasant sound I niver heard since I was a baby.”

“I quite agree with you, Tim, as to its unpleasantness. It is a shell. The artillery are coming up from Luneville. The fire of the sentries would take the alarm in a couple of minutes; give them another fifteen to get ready, and half an hour to get within range. Here comes another.”

“Are you ready, Ribouville?” the Commandant shouted. “They have cavalry as well as artillery. We must be off, or we shall get caught in a trap.”

“I am ready,” was the answer. “Barclay, strike a match, and put it to the end of your fuse till it begins to fizz. Have you lit it?”

“Yes, sir,” Ralph said, a moment later.

“So have I,” the lieutenant said. “They will burn about three minutes. Now for a run!”

In a couple of minutes the franc-tireurs were retreating at the double, and they had not gone a hundred yards when they heard the sound of two tremendous explosions following closely one upon another. Looking back they saw that the pier had fallen in fragments, and that the bridge lay a heap of ~~ruins in~~ the stream.

“Hurrah, ~~lads!~~” shouted the Commandant. “You have done your work well. Those who get out of this with a whole skin may well be proud of their day’s work. Don’t mind the shells,” he continued, as two more of the missiles burst in quick succession within a short distance of them. “They make an ugly noise, but they won’t hurt us at this distance.”

The German artillerymen had apparently arrived at the same conclusion, for they now ceased to fire, and the retreating corps were only exposed to an occasional shot from the infantry who had followed them from the bridge.

"The artillery and cavalry will be up before we reach the wood," Percy said to his brother, as they trotted along side by side.

"They may come up," Ralph said, "but they can do us no harm on the broken ground, and will catch a Tartar if they don't mind."

The ground was indeed unfavourable for cavalry and artillery. It was broken up with the spurs of the hill. Here and there great masses of rock cropped out of the ground, while patches of forest extended over a considerable portion of the ground. In one of these, standing upon rising and broken ground, Major Tempé halted his men, and opened so heavy a fire upon the enemy's cavalry when the column appeared that they were at once halted, and although, when the artillery arrived, a few shells were fired into the wood, the franc-tireurs had already retired and gained the forest without further molestation. Upon calling the roll it was discovered that six men only were missing. These had fallen either killed or wounded from the fire of the enemy's infantry during the time that the operations at the bridge were being carried out.

There was great rejoicing at the success of their enterprise, the effect of which would certainly be to block the traffic along that line for at least a week. Their satisfaction was, however, somewhat damped by the sight of several dense columns of smoke in the plain, showing

that the Germans had, as usual, wreaked their vengeance upon the innocent villagers. The feeling of disgust was changed to fury when some of the peasants, who had fled into the woods upon the destruction of their abodes, reported the Germans having found that three of the franc-tireurs were only wounded, had dragged them along to the entrance to the village, and had them hung there upon some trees by the roadside. Had it not been for Major Tempé's assurance that their comrades should be avenged, the franc-tireurs would at once have killed their prisoners.

In the evening the men were formed up, the prisoners ranged in line, and twelve were taken by lot; and these, with the officer taken with them, when night fell, were bound and marched off under a guard of thirty men. Neither of the boys formed part of the escort, which was an immense relief to them; for although they were as indignant as the rest at the murder of their wounded comrades by the Germans, and quite agreed in the justice of reprisal, still they were greatly relieved when they found that they would not have to be present at the execution.

Two hours later Major Tempé returned with the escort. The officer and eleven of his men had been hung on trees by the roadside at a distance of half a mile only from the village; the twelfth man had been released as bearer of a note from Major Tempé to the German commanding officer, saying that, as a reprisal for the murder of the three wounded franc-tireurs, he had hung twelve Germans, and that in future he would always hang four prisoners for every one of his men who might be murdered contrary to the rules of war. This act of retributive justice performed, the corps re-

treated to join the army of the Vosges under General Cambriels.

The news of the destruction of the bridge across the Vosges had preceded them, and when, after three days' heavy marching, they reached the village which formed the head-quarters of the General, they were received with loud cheers by the crowds of Mobiles who thronged its little streets. It was out of the question to find quarters, and the Major therefore ordered the men to bivouac in the open while he reported himself to General Cambriels. The Commandant of the franc-tireurs was personally known to General Cambriels, having at one time served for some years under his command, and he was most warmly received by the veteran, one of the bravest and most popular of the French generals. As general of the district he had received all Major Tempé's reports, and was therefore acquainted with the actions of the corps.

"Ah, Major!" he said, after the first greetings, "if I had only a few thousand men animated with the spirit and courage of your fellows, the Germans would never get through the Vosges. As it is, I shall of course do my best; but what can one do with an army of plough-boys led by officers who know nothing of their duty, against troops like the Germans? As for my franc-tireurs, they are in many cases worse than useless. They have no discipline whatever; they embroil me with the peasantry; they are always complaining; the whole of them together have not done as much real service as your small band; they shoot down Uhlans when they catch them in very small parties, but have no notion whatever of real fighting. However, I cannot thank you too warmly. Your name will appear

in the Gazette to-morrow as Colonel, and I must ask you to extend the sphere of your duties. We want officers terribly, and I will brigade four or five of these corps of franc-tireurs under your orders, so as to make up a force of a thousand men. You will have full authority over them, to enforce any discipline you may choose. I want you to make a body to act as an advanced guard of skirmishers to my army of Mobiles. I have a few line troops, but I want them as a nucleus for the force. What do you say ?”

“ Personally, General, I should greatly prefer remaining with my own little corps, upon every man of whom I can rely, at the same time I should not wish for a moment to oppose my own likings or dislikings to the general good of the service. Many of these corps of franc-tireurs are composed of excellent materials, and if well led and disciplined would do any thing. I can only say I will do my best.”

“ Thank you, Tempé, is there any thing else I can do for you ?”

“ I should like to see a step given to the three officers serving under me,” the Major said. “ They have all served in the regular army, and all have equally well done their duty.”

“ It shall be done ; and two of them shall be posted to other corps, while one takes the command of your own,” the General said. “ Do you wish commissions for any of the men ?”

Major Tempé named three of the men, and then added, “ The two members of the corps who have most distinguished themselves I have not mentioned, General, because they are too young to place over the heads of the

others; at the same time their services certainly deserve recognition. I mentioned them in the despatches I sent to you as having done immense service by going down in disguise into the midst of the Germans. In fact at Saverne they saved the corps from destruction. They are two young English lads named Barclay."

"I remember distinctly," General Cambriels said. "They speak French fluently, I suppose, as well as German?"

"Both languages like natives," the Major answered.

"And can they ride?"

"Yes, admirably," Major Tempé said. "I knew them before the war, and they are excellent horsemen."

"Then they are the very fellows for me," General Cambriels said. "I will give them commission in the provisional army at once, and put them upon my own staff. They would be of great value to me. You will spare them, I hope?"

"I shall be extremely sorry to do so, General, but for their own sakes and for the good of the service I will of course do so."

"Thanks, Colonel; I shall put the franc-tireurs of Dijon in general orders to-morrow as having performed good service to the country, and please to thank them in my name for their services."

"Thank you very much, General; it will give me more pleasure than even the step that you have been kind enough to give to myself."

"Good evening, Colonel, we must have a long chat together one of these days. The chief of my staff will give you the names of the corps to be placed under your

orders. The matter was settled this morning, and I have picked out the best of those here. Orders have been sent for them to assemble to Raoul, a village a mile from here in the morning, with a notification that they are placed under your command. Good-bye."





CHAPTER XI.

A FIGHT IN THE VOSGES.

UPON Colonel Tempé's rejoining the men, who were already busy preparing their suppers, he ordered the assembly to be sounded, and when they were formed up, he formally thanked them in the name of the general for the service that they had rendered, adding that they would appear in general orders upon the following day. The men replied with a cheer of "Vive la France." Their Commander then informed them that he himself had received a step in rank, and would in future command them with several other corps; that Lieutenant Ribouville would in future be their special commander with the rank of Captain, that the other two lieutenants would be promoted, and that three of their number would receive commissions; and while one of them remained under Captain Ribouville, the other would with the newly-made Captain be attached to other corps. The two Barclays would receive commission as officers on the Staff of General Cambriels himself.

When Colonel Tempé finished speaking the boys could hardly believe their ears, and looked at each other to inquire if they heard aright. There could be no mistake about it, for Colonel Tempé called them forward, and, shaking hands with them, congratulated them on the promotion which, he said, they had well earned. The men gave a hearty cheer, for the young English lads were general favourites for their good temper and willingness to oblige.

Directly the men were dismissed the Colonel again called the lads to him. "I am sorry to lose you," he said, "but of course it is for your good. Come with me at once to General Cambriels, I will introduce you, and you had better ask for four days' leave; you can get the railway in four hours' ride from here. You will have no difficulty in finding a place in some of the Commissariat cities going to fetch stores. If you start to-night you can catch a train before morning, and be in Dijon quite early. A couple of days will be sufficient to get your uniforms made, and to buy horses. Your cousin will go with you; I gave him leave last night to start upon our arrival here. He is not so strong as you are, and the surgeon says that he must have rest and quiet; he is quite worn out. Now pile your rifles, you will not want them any more, and come with me. I have said good-night to the general, but he will excuse me."

Still bewildered, the boys did as they were ordered. As they were piling their rifles they heard a loud blubbering; looking round they saw Tim Doyle weeping most copiously.

"What is the matter, Tim?"

“Matter! your honour, ain’t yer going to lave us? What am I going to do at all?”

The boys hurried away without reply, for Colonel Tempé was waiting for them, and on the way to head quarters mentioned Tim’s grief at parting with them.

The General received the lads most kindly, and at once granted them four days’ leave to go to Dijon to procure uniform. Colonel Tempé then said, “You do not want orderlies, do you, General?”

“I do, indeed,” the General answered; “I have about a dozen cavalry men of different regiments who form my escort and act as orderlies, but they are my entire force of cavalry.”

“I have an Irishman in my corps, General, who only joined to be near these young fellows; he was brought up among horses, and you have only to put him on an hussar uniform, and he would make a capital orderly, and would act as servant to your new staff officers.”

“By all means,” the General said; “send him over in the morning. We will make an hussar of him in half an hour; we have got a few uniforms in store.”

What a meeting that was near Dijon! The boys upon reaching the station had found a train upon the point of starting, and it was seven in the morning when they reached the town. The shops open early in French country towns, and although their tailor had not as yet taken his shutters down he was up and about, and willingly measured them for their new uniforms, promising that they should have them without fail the next afternoon. They then walked up to the cottage, and dropped in just as the party there were sitting down to breakfast.

There was a loud exclamation from Captain Barclay, and a scream of delight from their mother and Milly, and it was a good ten minutes before they were sitting round the table, talking coherently. It was but six weeks since they had left, but it seemed like years, and there was as much to tell and to talk about as if they had just returned after an absence of half a life time in India.

“How long have you got leave for?” was one of the first questions.

“Only four days,” Percy said. “The corps has now joined the army of the Vosges, and will act regularly with it. A move forward will take place in a few days, so that we could not ask for longer.”

“Only four days !” Mrs. Barclay and Milly repeated aghast.

“It is not much, mamma,” Ralph put in, “but it is better than nothing ; you see you did not expect us at all.”

“Quite so,” Captain Barclay said cheerfully. “It is a clear gain, and we waste the time in regretting that it is not longer. It is a great delight to have you back again, even for a few hours. You both look wonderfully well, and fully a year older than when you left. Roughing it, and exposure evidently suits you. Has Louis come back with you ?”

“Yes, papa, he has come back to stay for some time, he is completely done up, and the surgeon has ordered rest and quiet for a while. How is Philippe ?”

“He is getting on well, and will walk, the doctor hopes, in another fortnight or three weeks, but I have not seen him ; for although your uncle comes in as usual for

a chat with me, Madame Duburg has never forgiven me, for having as she says influenced him in allowing the boys to go, and of course since this wound of Philippe's she has been more angry than ever."

The boys laughed, they understood their aunt's ways.

"Tim has not been hurt, I hope?" Milly asked.

"Oh, no; Tim is as well as ever, and the life and soul of the corps."

As breakfast went on the boys gradually related the changes that were taking place; Major Tempé's promotion to be colonel, and the fact that he was placed in command of several corps of franc-tireurs, who were hereafter to act together. They said no word, however, about their own promotion, having agreed to keep that matter secret until the uniforms were completed. They had also asked their cousin to say nothing about it at home, as otherwise their uncle would have been sure to have come in to congratulate them, and the secret would have been at an end at once. An hour later M. Duburg came in to see them.

After the first talk he said to Captain Barclay: "The way in which your boys have stood the fatigue, is a proof in itself how much the prosperity of a nation depends upon the training of its boys. England is strong, because her boys are all accustomed, from their childhood, to active exercise and outdoor violent games. In case of a war like this which we are going through, almost every man could turn soldier, and go through the fatigues of a campaign; and what is more, could make light of, not to say enjoy them. Here, upon the contrary, our young fellows do nothing, and in an emergency like the

present want both spirit and strength to make soldiers. Almost all the boys who went from here in Tempé's corps have returned completely worn out. Even Louis is a wreck, although, thanks to the companionship of your boys, he has supported it better and longer than the majority of them. Had he began as a child to take pleasure in strong exercise no doubt he could have stood it as well as Ralph and Percy, who look absolutely benefited by it. Unfortunately, I allowed my wife's silly objection to prevail until the last three years, when I insisted that they should do as they liked. As I have said before, Barclay, I say again; I congratulate you on your boys; you have a right to be proud of them. I wish the race of young Frenchmen were only like them."

Great, indeed, was the astonishment, upon the afternoon of the following day, when Ralph and Percy walked into the sitting-room dressed as staff-officers; feeling a little awkward with their swords, but flushed with an honourable pleasure and pride, for their epaulets had been gained by no family interests, no private influence; they were worn as the reward of good service. Captain Barclay wrung the boys' hands silently. Their mother cried with delight, and Milly danced round the boys like a small possessed-one.

"It is not for the absolute rank itself, boys, that I am pleased," their father said, when they had related the whole circumstances, "for you have no idea of remaining in the French service, and consequently the rank will be of no use to you after the end of the war; still it is a thing all your lives to be proud of—that you won your commission in the French army by good service."

"What I am thinking of most," Mrs. Barclay said, "is that now they are officers in the regular army they will run no risk of being shot if they are taken prisoners."

"We don't mean to be taken prisoners, mamma ; still, as you say, it is certainly an advantage in favour of the regular uniform."

"And what is to become of Tim?" Milly asked.

"Oh, Tim is going to become an hussar, and act as one of the General's orderlies, and be our servant when he has nothing else to do. You see, now we are officers, we have a right to servants."

"I am very glad Tim is going with you," Mrs. Barclay said ; "my brother tells us that he saved Philippe's life, and it seems a comfort to know that he is with you."

The next morning Captain Barclay went down with them to the town and purchased a couple of capital horses, which by great good fortune were on sale.

Upon the morning of the fourth day of their visit the boys took leave of their father and mother, and left to join the head-quarters of General Cambriels. The parting was far less trying than it had been the first time they went away. The boys were not now going out to an unknown danger. Although the risk that a staff-officer runs is absolutely somewhat greater than that incurred by a regimental officer, still it is slight in comparison with the risk run by a franc-tireur employed in harassing an enemy, and in cutting his communications, especially when capture means death. Those who remained behind were encouraged partly by this thought, but still more by the really irrational one, that as the boys had gone away

and come back safe once, they would probably do so again.

The evening of the same day the Barclays reported themselves for duty to the General, and next morning began work. Their duty was hard, though simple. By day they were constantly on duty, that is to say, either riding over the country, or waiting near the General's quarters, in readiness for a start, or, more seldom, writing and drawing up reports in the office. By night they took it in turns with the other staff-officers to be on duty, that is to say, to lie down to sleep, in uniform, with the horse saddled at the door, in readiness to start at an instant's notice. Tim's duties as an orderly were not heavy, and were generally over by five o'clock, after which he acted as servant to the boys. It was impossible, under the circumstances, for the staff to mess together as usual. There was neither a room available, nor indeed any of the appliances. Among Tim's other duties, therefore, was that of cooking. They had also another orderly allotted to them, and he devoted himself to the care of the horses, Tim undertaking all other work.

The boys liked their new duties much. The work was hard, but pleasant; their fellow-officers were pleasant companions, and their General most kind and genial.

A week after they had joined, General Cambriels advanced into the Vosges to oppose the Prussians who were marching south. The progress of the army was slow, for they had to carry what supplies they required with them. Colonel Tempé kept with his command a few hours' march ahead, and one or other of the boys was

frequently despatched with orders, &c., to obtain reports from him. After three days' marching they neared the enemy. All was now watchfulness and excitement; the franc-tireurs were already engaged in skirmishing, and early one morning Ralph received orders to ride forward and reconnoitre the enemy's position. Passing through the posts of franc-tireurs, he rode cautiously along the road, with his hand on the butt of his revolver, and his horse well in hand, ready to turn and ride for his life on an instant's notice. Presently, as the road wound through a narrow gorge lined with trees, he heard a voice say, close in his ear, "Stop!" He reined in his horse and drew his pistol. The leaves parted, and a man of some sixty years of age, armed with an old double-barrelled fowling-piece, stepped out.

"The Germans are just beyond," he said; "I expect them every moment."

"And what are you doing here?" Ralph asked.

"What am I doing?" repeated the peasant. "I am waiting to shoot some of them."

"But they will hang you, to a certainty, if they catch you."

"Let them," the old man said, quietly; "they will do me no more harm than they have done me. I had a nice farm near Metz; I lived there with my wife and daughter, and my three boys. Some one fired at the Prussians from a wood near. No one was hit, but that made no difference. The black-hearted scoundrels came to my farm, shot my three boys before their mother's eyes, ill-treated her so that she died next day, and when I returned—for I was away at the time—I found a heap of ashes

where my house had stood, the dead bodies of my three boys, my wife dying, and my daughter sitting by, screaming with laughter, mad—quite mad! I took her away to a friend's house, and stayed with her till she died too, a fortnight after; then I bought this gun and some powder and lead with my last money, and went out to kill Prussians. I have killed thirteen already, and, please God," and the peasant lifted his hat devoutly, "I will kill two more to-day."

"How is it that you have escaped so long?" Ralph asked in surprise.

"I never fire at infantry," the peasant said. "It was Uhlans that did it, and it's only Uhlans I fire at. I put myself on a rock or a hillside where they can't come, or in a thick wood, and I content myself with my two shots, and then go. I don't want to be killed yet. I have set my mind on having fifty—just ten for each of mine—and when I've shot the last of the fifty, the sooner they finish me the better. You'd better not go any further, sir. The valley widens out round the corner, and there are Prussians in the nearest village."

"Thank you," Ralph said, "but my orders are to reconnoitre them myself, and I must do so. I am well mounted, and I don't think that they will catch me if I get a couple of hundred yards' start. There are franc-tireurs in the village a mile back."

Ralph now rode carefully forward, while the peasant went back into his hiding-place by the wood. As he had said, the gorge widened into a broad valley a few hundred yards further on. Upon emerging from the gorge Ralph at once saw a village, almost hidden among trees, at a

distance of less than a quarter of a mile. After what he had heard, he dared not ride on further. He therefore drew his horse aside from the road among some trees, dismounted, and made his way carefully up the rocky side of the hill to a point from which he could command a view down the whole valley. When he gained this spot, he looked cautiously round; below, beyond the village, he could see large numbers of men, could make out lines of cavalry horses, and rows of artillery. A considerable movement was going on, and Ralph had no doubt that they were about to advance. In his interest in what he saw he probably exposed his figure somewhat, and caught the eye of some sharp-sighted sentry in the village.

The first intimation of his danger was given him by seeing some twenty Uhlans dart suddenly out of the trees in which the village lay at the top of their speed, while almost at the same moment eight or ten rifles flashed, and the balls whizzed round him in most unpleasant proximity. Ralph turned in an instant, and bounded down the rock with a speed and recklessness of which at any other moment he would have been incapable. Fierce as was the pace at which the Uhlans were galloping, they were still a hundred yards distant when Ralph leaped upon his horse and galloped out in front of them. There was a rapid discharge of their carbines, but men at full gallop make but poor shooting. Ralph felt he was untouched, but by the convulsive spring which his horse gave he knew the animal was wounded. For a couple of hundred yards there was but little difference in his speed, and then Ralph, to his dismay, felt him flag, and knew that the wound had been a severe one. Another hundred

yards, and the animal staggered and would have fallen had not Ralph held him up well with knee and bridle. The Uhlans saw it, for they gave a shout, and a pistol-bullet whizzed close to his head. Ralph looked round : an officer, twenty yards ahead of his men, was only about forty yards in his rear. In his hand he held a revolver, which he had just discharged. "Surrender !" he shouted, "or you are a dead man !"

Ralph saw that his pursuers were too close to enable him to carry out his intention of dismounting and taking to the wood, which here began to approach thickly close to the road, and was on the point of throwing up his arm in token of surrender, when his horse fell heavily with him, at the moment when the Prussian again fired. Almost simultaneously with the crack of the pistol came the report of a gun, and the German officer fell off his horse, shot through the heart.

Ralph leapt to his feet and dashed up the bank in among the trees just as another shot was fired with a like fatal result into the advancing Uhlans. The rest, believing that they had fallen into an ambush, instantly turned their horses' heads and galloped back the road they had come.

Ralph's first impulse was to rush down into the road and catch the officer's horse, which had galloped on a short distance when its master fell, and was now returning to follow its companions. As he did so the old peasant appeared from the wood. "Thank you," Ralph said warmly. "You have saved my life, or at any rate have saved me from a German prison."

The peasant paid no attention to him, but stooped

down to examine carefully whether the Germans were both dead.

"Two more," he said, with a grim smile. "That makes fifteen. Three apiece."

Then he picked up the officer's revolver, took the cartridge belonging to it from the pouch, and, with a wave of the hand to Ralph, strode back into the wood.

Ralph removed the holsters from the saddle of his own horse, which had fallen dead, placed them on the horse of the German officer, and then mounting it, rode off at full speed to inform General Cambriels of the results of his investigation.

"Hallo, Barclay," one of his fellow-officers said, as he rode up to the head-quarters, "what have you been up to? Doing a little barter with a German hussar? You seem to have got the best of him too, for your own horse was a good one, but this is a good deal better unless I am mistaken. How has it come about?"

Quite a crowd of idlers had collected round while the officer was speaking, struck like him with the singularity of the sight of a French staff officer upon a horse with German trappings.

Ralph did not wish to enter into explanations there, so merely replied in the same jesting strain that it had been a fair exchange, the small difference in the value of the horses being paid for with a small piece of lead; then throwing his reins to his orderly, who came running up, he went in to report to the General the evident forward movements of the Germans.

"Are they as strong as we have heard?" the General asked.

“Fully, I should say, sir. I had no means of judging the infantry, but they seemed in large force. They were certainly strong in cavalry, and I saw some eight or ten batteries of artillery.”

“Let the next for duty ride with all speed to Tempé, and tell him to hold the upper end of this valley. Send Hervé’s battery forward to assist him. Have the general assembly sounded.”

Ralph left to obey these orders, while the General gave the Colonel of his staff the instructions for the disposition of his forces.

The army of the Vosges, pompous as was its name, consisted at this time of only some ten thousand men, all Mobiles or franc-tireurs, with the exception of a battalion of line and a battalion of Zouaves. The Mobiles were almost undisciplined, having only been out a month, and were for the most part armed only with the old muzzle-loader. Many were clothed only in the grey trousers with a red stripe, which forms part of the Mobiles’ uniform, and in a blue blouse. Great numbers of them were almost shoeless, having been taken straight from the plough or workshop, and having received no shoes since they joined. Half disciplined, half armed, half clothed, they were too evidently no match for the Germans. The fact was patent to their General and his officers, still his instructions were to make a stand at all hazards in the Vosges, and he now prepared to obey the orders, not hoping for victory, but trusting in the natural courage of his men to enable him to draw them off without serious disaster. His greatest weakness was his artillery, of which he had only two batteries against eight or ten of the

Germans, whose forces were, even numerically, superior to his own.

In half an hour the dispositions were made. The valley was wide at this point, and there were some five or six villages nestled in it. It was pretty thickly wooded, and two miles behind narrowed again considerably. Just as the troops had gained their appointed places, a faint sound of heavy musketry fire was heard in the gorge ahead, mingled in a few minutes with the deep boom of cannon. The General, surrounded by his staff, moved forward towards the spot. From the road at the entrance to the narrow part of the valley nothing could be seen, but the cracking of rifles among the trees and rocks on either side, the bursting of shells and the whistling of bullets were incessant. The General and his staff accordingly dismounted, handed their horses to the men of the escort, and mounted the side of the hill.

After a sharp climb they reached a point from whence they could see right down the long narrow valley. On beyond, the trees, except near the road, were thin, the steep sides of the hills being covered with great blocks of stone and thick brushwood. Among these, all down one side and up the other, at a distance of some five hundred yards from the post taken up by the General, a succession of quick puffs of smoke told where Colonel Tempé's franc-tireurs were placed, while among the trees below there came up the great wreaths of smoke from the battery which was supporting them by firing at the Germans. These formed a long line up and down the sides of the valley at three or four hundred yards distant from the French lines. Two German batteries were down in the

road a few hundred yards to the rear of their skirmishers, and these were sending shells thickly up among the rocks where the franc-tireurs were lying hid, while two other batteries, which the Germans had managed to put a short way up on the mountain sides, still farther in the rear, were raining shell with deadly precision upon the French batteries in the road.

A prettier piece of warfare it would have been difficult to imagine—the lofty mountain sides ; the long lines of little puffs of smoke among the brush-wood and rocks ; the white smoke arising from the trees in the bottom ; the quick dull bursts of the shells ; as a spectacle it was most striking. The noise was prodigious : the steep sides of the mountain echoed each report of the guns into a prolonged roar like the rumble of thunder, the rattle of the musketry never ceased for an instant, and loud and distinct above the din rose the menacing scream of the shells.

“This is grand, indeed, Ralph !” Percy said, after a moment’s silence.

“Splendid !” Ralph said ; “but it is evident we cannot hold the gorge, their skirmishers are three to our one, and their shells must be doing terrible damage.”

“Barclay,” General Cambriels said, “go down to the battery, and bring me back word how they are getting on.”

The scene quite lost its beauty to Percy now, as he saw Ralph scramble rapidly down the hill side in the direction of the trees, among which the French battery was placed, and over and among which the shells were bursting every second. It seemed like entering a fiery

furnace. It was a terribly long ten minutes before Ralph was seen climbing up the hill side again, and Percy's heart gave a jump of delight when he first caught sight of his figure. As Ralph came near, his brother saw that he was very pale, and had a handkerchief bound round one arm; this was already soaked with blood. He kept on steadily, however, until he reached the General, who had, upon seeing he was wounded, advanced to meet him.

"One gun is dismantled, sir, and half the men are killed or wounded."

"Go down, Harcourt, and tell Hervé to fall back at once, and to take position in the clump of trees a quarter of a mile down the valley, so as to sweep the entrance. Laon, go to the right, and you, Dubois, to the left; order the franc-tireurs to retreat along the hill side, and when they get to the end of the gorge to form in the plain and fall back to the first village. You are wounded, Barclay, not seriously I hope," he said, kindly, as the officers hurried away on their respective missions.

"A splinter of a shell, sir," Ralph said, faintly; "I don't think it has touched the bone, but it has cut the flesh badly." Ralph was just able to say this when his head swam, and he would have fallen had not Percy caught him in his arms, with a little cry.

"He has only fainted from loss of blood," the General said. "Two or three handkerchiefs, gentlemen; now, Major, bind them round his arm; now take off his sash, and bind it as tightly as you can over them. That's right. Now carry him down the rocks to the horses, we have no time to lose."

Two of the officers at once put their arms under Ralph's shoulders, while Percy took his feet, and they hastened down to the horses. As they did so Ralph opened his eyes. "I am all right now," he said, faintly.

"Lie quiet," the Major said, kindly; "it is only loss of blood, there is no real harm done. There, here are the horses." Ralph was placed sitting on the ground, a little brandy-and-water was given to him, and as the blood was oozing but slowly through the bandage he felt sufficiently restored to sit on his horse.

"Doyle, you go with Lieutenant Barclay," the colonel of the staff said. "Ride slowly, and keep close beside him, so as to catch him if you see him totter. You will find the surgeons ready at the General's quarters. Halt, stand aside for a moment; here comes the artillery."

"Well done, lads, well done," the General said as the diminished battery rattled past at full gallop. Then he himself, with his staff, put spurs to his horse and went off at full speed, while Tim followed at a walk, riding by the side of Ralph. The flow of blood had now stopped, and Ralph was able to sit his horse until he reached the house which had served as the General's head-quarters in the morning. Here one of the staff-surgeons had fitted up a temporary ambulance, and Ralph's bandages were soon taken off and his coat removed. Tim turned sick at the sight of the ugly gash in his young master's arm, and was obliged to go out into the air. The artillery were already at work, and their fire told that the franc-tireurs had retired from the gorge, and that the Germans were entering the wider valley.

"You have had a narrow escape," the surgeon said,

after examining Ralph's arm; "a quarter of an inch lower, and it would have cut the main artery, and you would have bled to death in five minutes. As it is, there is no great harm done. It is a deepish flesh-wound, but with your youth and constitution it will heal up in a very short time. I will draw the edges together with a needle and thread, put a few straps of plaister on and a bandage, and then you had better get into an ambulance waggon and go to the rear at once."

"Can't I go into the field again now?" Ralph asked; "I feel as if I could ride again now."

"No, you can do nothing of the sort," the surgeon said; "you have lost a lot of blood, and if you were to ride now, it might set off the wound bleeding again, and you might be a dead man before you could be brought back here. Keep quiet and do as you are ordered, and in a week you may be in the saddle again."

"It seems very hard," Ralph began.

"Not at all hard," the surgeon said; "you will see plenty more fighting before this war is over; this is a hard case if you like, you have every reason to be thankful."

As he spoke, he pointed to a young Mobile who was brought in, his chest literally torn open with a shell. "I can do nothing for him," the surgeon said, after a brief inspection of his wound; "he has not half an hour to live, and will probably not recover consciousness. If he does, give him some weak brandy and water."

Wounded men were now being brought in fast, and Ralph went out and sat down by the door. "Fasten my horse up here, Tim; the ambulance will be full of poor

fellows who will want them more than I shall. If I see that we are being driven back I shall mount and ride quietly back. No, there is nothing more you can do for me ; go and join Percy."

The fight was now raging furiously. The Germans, covered by the fire of their artillery, had debouched from the pass and were steadily pressing forward. They had already carried the village nearest to them. This the French had set fire to before retreating to prevent its serving as a shelter for the enemy. The Mobiles stood their ground for the most part well under the heavy fire of shot and shell, but their muzzle-loaders were no match for the Germans' needle guns, and the enemy were pressing steadily forward. Just as Tim Doyle rode up to the staff the Germans had taken another village.

"That village must be retaken," the General said. "Barclay, ride and order the Zouaves to carry it with the bayonet."

Percy galloped off to where the Zouaves, lying behind a ridge in the ground, were keeping up a heavy fire in answer to the storm of shot and shell which fell around them. He rode up to the officer in command : "The Zouaves are to retake the village with the bayonet," he said.

The Colonel gave the order, but the fire was so heavy that the men would not face it. Again and again the officer reiterated the order, standing exposed on the bank in front of his men to give them confidence. It was in vain, and the Colonel looked towards Percy with an air of despair. Percy turned his horse and galloped back to the General.

"The Colonel has done all he can, sir, but the men won't advance."

"The fire is very heavy," the General said, "but we must have the village back again." And he rode off himself to the battalion of Zouaves. The shot and shell were flying around him, but he sat on his horse as immovable as if at a review.

"My lads," he said in a loud clear tone, "generally the difficulty has been to prevent the Zouaves rushing to an attack. Don't let it be said that a French general had to repeat to French Zouaves an order to charge before they obeyed him."

In an instant the Zouaves were on their feet, and with a cheer went at the village. The Germans in possession fired rapidly as the French approached, and then hastily evacuated it, the Zouaves taking possession and holding it under a tremendous fire.

All the afternoon the battle raged, villages being taken and retaken several times. The Germans, however, were gradually gaining ground. Some of the regiments of Mobiles had quite lost all order and discipline, and their officers in vain tried to persuade them to hold the position in which they were placed. Two of the staff officers were killed, three others wounded. Percy had escaped almost by a miracle. Over and over again he had carried the General's orders across ground swept by the enemies' shot and shell. A horse had been killed under him, but he had not received even a scratch, and now mounted upon the horse of one of the officers who was killed he was returning from carrying an order across a very open piece of ground at full gallop. Suddenly he



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came upon a sight which, hurried as he was, and exposed as was the position, caused him instantly to draw his rein, and come to a full stop. There in the open field were two children. The one a boy of six or seven years old, the other a little flaxen-haired blue-eyed girl of five. They were quietly picking flowers.

"What are you doing here?" Percy asked in astonishment. He spoke in French, and receiving no answer repeated the question in German.

"What are you doing here?"

"If you please, sir," the boy answered, "I have been out in the wood with Lizzie to pick flowers, and when I came back there was a great fire in the house, and a great noise all round, and I couldn't find father and mother, and so we came out to look for them."

Percy did not know what to do. It was too pitiful to leave the poor little creatures where they were, and yet he could not carry them away. He had no doubt that their parents were hid in the woods.

"Look here," he said; "if I take Lizzy upon my horse will you run along after me?"

"No, no," the little girl said vehemently.

There was no time for parley.

"Look here, do you see those soldiers lying down in a ditch?" Percy asked, pointing to a line of Mobiles not fifty yards in front. The children nodded. "Now look here, the best thing you can possibly do is to play at being soldiers. It is capital fun; you lie down quite flat in that ditch and throw little stones over the bank. Don't you go away; don't get up whatever you do, and if you are good children and play nicely I will send father and

mother to you if I can find them. If they don't come you go on playing at soldiers till all this noise stops; and then, when it is quite quiet, you go home and wait there till father and mother come back."

The children were delighted with the idea, and threw themselves flat in the bottom of the ditch, and Percy went on again at full gallop. The French were now being driven back towards the point where the valley narrowed again, and many of the Mobiles were in full flight. General Cambriels therefore withdrew his artillery to a point where they could cover the movements, and then ordered a rapid retreat, ten regiments of line and the Zouaves acting as rear guard. It was already getting dark, and the movements were carried out with but slight loss. The Germans, contented with their success, attempted no movement in pursuit.



CHAPTER XII.

THE SURPRISE.

AFTER the check in the Vosges, General Cambriels found it impossible to restore sufficient order among the Mobiles to enable him to show face again to the enemy. He was, besides, in want of many articles of urgent necessity. Half his force were shoeless, and the thin blouses which were, as has been said, all the covering that many of the Mobiles had, were ill calculated to resist the bitter cold which was already setting in. Ammunition, too, as well as food, was short. The general determined, therefore, upon falling back upon Besançon, and re-organizing his forces there. A wound in his head, too, which was insufficiently healed when he took the command, had now broken out again, and his surgeon ordered absolute repose for awhile.

Upon the day of the fight Ralph had ridden slowly to the rear when he saw that the fight was going against the French. Hardened as he was by his work, and with an excellent constitution, his wound never for a moment

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assumed a troublesome aspect ; but at the end of a week he was able, keeping it, of course, in a sling, to mount his horse and report himself ready for duty.

The head-quarters were now at Besançon, and Ralph could, had he applied for it, have obtained leave to go to Dijon ; but he had not done so, as he had been so lately at home, and he thought that the sight of his arm in a sling would be likely to make his mother more nervous and anxious on their account than before. The Germans were still at some distance from Besançon, being watched by Colonel Tempé and his franc-tireurs and by the irregular forces.

A considerable army was now fast gathering at Besançon, and the regimental and superior staff officer were hard at work at the organization. As aides-de-camp the boys had little to do, and therefore requested leave for two or three days to go up to their old friends, the franc-tireurs of Dijon. The general at once granted the required permission, adding, with a smile—

“Don't forget you are officers now, lads, and get into any hair-brained adventures, you know ; and be sure you are back on Thursday, as I expect General Michel, my successor, to arrive on Friday, and I shall have to give you as part of my belongings.”

“We are sure to be back, general.” And so they set off, taking, as usual, Tim Doyle with them as orderly and servant.

“Faith, and I'm glad enough to be out in the open again, Misther Ralph,” Tim said, as they left Besançon behind. “After living out in the woods for six weeks, there does not seem room to breathe in a crowded town.”

"It's jolly to be out again, Tim ; but I don't know that I mind a town again for a few days."

"Ah, it's all very well for the likes of yees, Mистер Ralph, with your officer's uniform, and your arm in a sling, and the girls all looking at you as a hero, but for me it's different intirely. Out in the open I feel that, except when there's any thing to do for your honours, I am my own master, and can plase myself. Here in the town I am a common hussar, and my arm is just weary with saluting to all the fellows with a sword by their side that I meet in the street. Then there's no chance of any fighting as long as we're shut up in the walls of a town, and what's the use of being decked up in uniform except to fight? Is there any chance of just the least scrimmage in the world while we are back again with the boys?" he asked, persuasively.

The boys laughed. "Not much, Tim ; but we shall be pretty close to the enemy, and something may turn up at any moment. But surely you've had enough in the last six weeks?"

"Pretty well, Mister Percy—pretty well ; but, you see, the last affair didn't count."

"Oh, didn't it count !" Ralph said, looking at his arm. "I think it counted for two or three fights ; and if you were not hit, I am sure you were fired at often enough to satisfy the most desperate lover of fighting, Tim."

"I was fired at often enough, I daresay, Mister Ralph, and I can't say that I liked it intirely. It isn't so mighty pleasant sitting like a stiff statue behind the general, with the shells falling about you like peas, and not allowed the divershun of a single shot back in return. 'Shoot

away,' says I, 'as hard as you like, but let's shoot back in return.'"

The boys laughed, and the day passed pleasantly as they rode and talked. The dusk had already fallen when they reached a party of franc-tireurs. It was not their own corps, nor could the officer in command tell exactly where they could find them.

"We are scattered over a considerable extent of country," he said, "and the colonel alone could tell you how we are all placed. I expect that he will be here to-night, and your best plan will be to stay here till he comes. We have not much to offer you, but, such as it is, it is at your service."

After a moment's consultation, the boys agreed to accept the offer, as they had palpably more chance of meeting Colonel Tempé there than in a journey through the woods at night, and in another ten minutes their horses were tied to trees, and they were sitting by a blazing fire with the officers of franc-tireurs. The village only consisted of three or four houses, and as there were fifty men in the party upon which they had come, they bivouacked under the trees hard by.

"How far off are the Germans?" Ralph asked, when dinner was over, and they lay by the fire smoking cigars.

"Ten miles or so," the officer answered carelessly.

"No chance of their coming this way, I hope," Ralph laughed. "We were very nearly caught near Saverne once."

"So I heard," the officer said, "but I am rather sceptical as to these night surprises. In nine cases out of ten—mind, I don't mean for a moment that it was so in

your case—but in nine cases out of ten, these rumours of night attacks are all moonshine.”

“Perhaps so,” Ralph said a little gravely, for he had already noticed that the discipline was very different among these men than that to which he had been accustomed among the franc-tireurs of Dijon, “perhaps so, but we can hardly be too careful. How do you all like Colonel Tempé?”

“The colonel would be an excellent fellow were he not our colonel,” the officer laughed. “He is a most unconscionable man. For ever marching, and drilling, and disciplining. If he had his way he would make us like a regiment of line, as if there could be any good in carrying out all that sort of thing with franc-tireurs. He had about half of us together for three or four days, and I give you my word it was as bad as slavery. Drill, drill, drill, from morning till night. I was heartily glad, I can tell you, when I got away with this detachment.”

Ralph saw that his new acquaintance was one of that innumerable class who conceived that drill and discipline were absurdities, and that it was only necessary for a Frenchman to shoulder a gun for him to be a soldier; so he easily avoided argument by turning the subject. For a couple of hours they chatted, and then as the fire was burning low, and the men had already laid down to sleep, Ralph suggested that they should do the same.

“I will walk round the sentries first with you if you like,” he said.

“Sentries!” the other said with a laugh, “there is my sentry,” and he pointed to a man standing ten paces off leaning against a tree. “The men have marched all

day, they only came in an hour before you did, and I am not going to waste their strength by putting half of them out to watch the forest. No, no, I am no advocate for harassing my men."

"Good night, then," Ralph said briefly, and he wrapped himself in his cloak and lay down. "We are not accustomed to this sort of thing Percy," he whispered to his brother in English, "and I don't like it. No wonder our franc-tireurs do so badly if this is a sample of their discipline."

"I don't like it either, Ralph. The Prussians are advancing, and if that fellow last heard of them as ten miles off, they are as likely as not to be only two. I shan't be sorry when morning comes."

"Nor I either, Percy; however, here we are, and we have no authority over this fellow, so we must make the best of it and hope that for once folly will not have its just reward."

So saying the boys remained silent for the night. But although silent, neither of them slept much, Ralph especially, whose arm was still very sore, and at times painful, hardly closed his eyes. He told himself it was absurd, but he could not help listening with painful attention. Had the night been a quiet one he need not have strained his ears, for, as he knew from the many hours he had passed at night upon guard, the hush is so intense in these great forests that one can hear the fall of a mountain stream miles away, and the snapping of a twig, or almost the falling of a leaf, will catch the ear. The night, however, was windy, and the rustle of the pine forest would have deadened all sound except any thing

sharp and near. The sentry did not appear similarly impressed with the necessity for any extraordinary attention, he was principally occupied in struggling against cold and drowsiness. He walked up and down, he stamped his foot, hummed snatches of songs, yawned with great vigour, and so managed to keep awake for two hours, when he roused the next for duty, and lay down with a grunt of relief.

At last, after keeping awake for hours, Ralph dozed off. How long he slept he knew not, but he was roused into full wakefulness by a touch on the shoulder, and by hearing Tim Doyle whisper,—

“Hist, Mister Ralph, I’ve my doubts that there is something wrong. I couldn’t sleep in this camp without watch or outposts, and for the last quarter of an hour I fancy I’ve been hearing noises. I don’t know which way they are coming, but it seems to me they are all round us. I may be wrong, sir, but as sure as the piper—”

“Hush, Tim,” Ralph said to the Irishman, who had crawled noiselessly along, and had lain down by his side. “Percy, are you awake?”

“Yes, I woke at Tim’s whisper, listen.”

They did listen, and distinctly above the sighing of the wind they could hear a rustling, cracking noise. Day was just breaking, but the light was not sufficiently strong to show objects with any distinctness among the trees.

“By Jove, we are surrounded,” Percy said, and was just going to alarm the camp when the sentry started into wakefulness, challenged, and fired.

The franc-tireurs woke and leapt to their feet. Percy

and Tim were about to do the same when Ralph held them down, "lie still," he said, "for your lives."

His words were not out of his lips when a tremendous volley rang out all round them, and half the franc-tireurs fell.

"Now!" Ralph said, leaping up, "make a rush for a house. To the houses all of you," he shouted loudly, "it is our only chance; we shall be shot down here like sheep."

The officer of the franc-tireurs had already atoned for his carelessness by his life, and the men obeyed Ralph's call, and amidst a heavy fire rushed across the fifty yards of open space to the houses. The door was burst in with the rush. Ralph had not stopped at the first house, but, followed by his brother and Tim Doyle, had run further on, and entered the last house in the village.

"Why did you not go in with the others Ralph? We have no chance of defending ourselves here, we have only our revolvers."

"We have no chance of defending ourselves any where, Percy," Ralph said, "there must be a couple of hundred of them at least, and not above fifteen or twenty at most of the franc-tireurs gained the houses. Resistance is utterly useless, and yet had I been with those poor fellows I could not have told them to surrender, when they would probably be shot five minutes afterwards. We should be simply throwing away our lives without doing the least good."

There was a heavy firing now heard, and a moment after half a dozen shots were fired through the window.

Then there was a rush of soldiers towards the door which Ralph had purposely left open.

"We surrender," Ralph shouted in German, coming forward to meet them. "We are French officers."

"Don't fire," a voice said, and then a young officer came forward. "You are not franc-tireurs?" he asked, for the light was still insufficient to enable him to distinguish uniforms.

"We are officers of the army upon General Cambriel's staff. This man is an orderly. Here are our swords. We surrender as prisoners of war."

The German officer bowed. "Keep your swords for the present, gentlemen, I am not in command." At this moment another officer came up. "Who have we here, Von Hersen? Why do you make prisoners?"

"They are two staff officers, major."

"Hem," said the major doubtfully. "Well, if you are an officer," he continued, "order your men to cease their resistance."

The franc-tireurs, most of whom had taken refuge in the same cottage, were still defending themselves desperately, and were keeping up a heavy fire from the windows.

"I will order them to surrender at once," Ralph said quietly, "If you give me your word that they shall be treated as prisoners of war."

"I will do nothing of the sort, sir," the German answered.

"Then I shall certainly not advise them to surrender," Ralph said firmly. "I have no authority whatever over them, but if I give advice it would be that they should sell their lives as dearly as possible."

The officer swore a deep German oath and strode off. For five more minutes the fight continued round the cottage, many of the Germans falling, then a rush was made, there was a fierce contest inside the house, shouts, shrieks, cries for mercy, and then all was still.

The young Barclays and Tim were now told to sit down near a tree at a short distance off, with two sentries with loaded rifles standing over them. The German soldiers took from the houses what few articles they fancied and then set fire to them, sitting down and eating their breakfast as the flames shot up. At a short distance from where the Barclays were sitting was a group of some eight or ten franc-tireurs and six or seven peasants, guarded by some soldiers. Near them the German major and two lieutenants were talking. One of the young men appeared to take little interest in the conversation, but the others were evidently urging some point with great earnestness, and the major was equally plainly refusing their requests, for he stamped his foot angrily and shook his head.

“What a type that major is of the brutal species of German,” Ralph said. “One used to meet them sometimes. Their officers are either particularly nice fellows, mere machines, or great brutes; apparently we have a specimen of each of them here.”

The officers passed near enough for the Barclays to catch what they were saying.

The young lieutenant was very pale. “For the last time, Major, I implore you.”

“For the last time, Lieutenant von Hersen,” the Major said, brutally, “I order you to do your duty, and

by heavens, if you speak another word I will put you in arrest."

The young lieutenant turned silently away, called up twenty men, and ordered them to place the franc-tireurs and the peasants against a wall.

"This is horrible, Ralph," Percy said. "That scoundrel is going to shoot them in cold blood."

"I protest against this execution," Ralph said in a loud tone, advancing towards the major, "as a cold-blooded murder, and a violation of all the rights of war."

"Hold your tongue, sir," the German major said, turning to him furiously, "or by heavens I will put you up there too."

"You dare not," Ralph said firmly. "Outrage as you do every law of civilization and humanity, you dare not shoot an officer of the army in cold blood."

The major turned black with passion.

"By heavens!" he exclaimed,

But the officer who had not hitherto interposed threw himself before him.

"Pardon me, major," he said respectfully, "but the Frenchman is right. It would bring discredit upon the whole army to touch these prisoners of war. In the other matter I have nothing to say. The order has been published that franc-tireurs and peasants sheltering them shall be shot, and it is not for me to discuss orders but to obey them ; but this is a matter affecting all our honours."

The major stood for a moment irresolute, but he knew well that the German military authorities would punish, probably with death, the atrocity which he meditated, and he said hoarsely to some of the men near, "Tie their

arms behind their backs, and take them farther into the wood."

Ralph, his brother, and Tim Doyle were hurried into the wood by their guards; but strict as is the discipline of the German army, they could see that they disapproved in the highest degree of the conduct of their commanding officer.

They were still near enough to see what was passing in the village. Not a man of the franc-tireurs begged his life, but stood upright against the wall. Two of the peasants imitated their example, as did a boy of not over thirteen years of age. Two other lads of the same age and a peasant fell on their knees and prayed piteously for life. The young officer turned round towards the Major in one now mute appeal. It was in vain.

"Put your rifles within a foot of their heads," the Lieutenant said. "Fire!"

When the smoke cleared away the soldiers were standing alone, and the peasants and franc-tireurs lay in a confused mass on the ground.

The lieutenant walked up to the major with a steady step, but with a face as pale as ashes. "I have done my duty, Major Kolbach, your orders are obeyed." Then without another word he drew out his revolver, put it rapidly to his temple and blew out his brains¹.

Brutal as Major Kolbach was, he started back in horror as the young lieutenant fell dead at his feet, while a cry of surprise and consternation broke from the men. The major did not say a word, but turned away and paced up and down with disturbed steps, while the

¹ An historical fact.

other lieutenant bent over the body of his comrade, and seeing that he was dead, in a hushed voice ordered the men who had run up to dig a grave under the trees and bring him there. When this was done he ordered the men to fall in, placing the Barclays and Tim in their midst, and then went up to the major and saluted, saying coldly that the men were ready to march. The major nodded, signed to the orderly who was holding his horse to approach, vaulted into the saddle and rode along the road back towards the main body of the army. The lieutenant gave the word and the column marched off, leaving behind it the still smoking houses, and the still warm bodies of some sixty men.

There was a general gloom over the faces of the men, and no one could suppose from their air that they were returning from a successful expedition in which they had annihilated a body of enemy fifty strong with the loss of only five or six of their own men. Discipline was, however, too strict for a word of blame or even of comment to be spoken, and not a sound was heard but the heavy, measured tramp as the troops marched back through the forests. The major rode on moodily some forty or fifty yards ahead of the main body.

They had not gone half a mile before there was a shot fired in the wood close to the road. The major gave a start and nearly fell from his horse, then recovered himself and turned to ride back to the column when there was another shot, and he fell off his horse heavily to the ground. The column had instinctively halted, and the lieutenant gave the word "load." A shout of triumph was heard in the wood "thirty one!" and then all was still.

"That's the old fellow who saved my life ten days ago Percy," Ralph said, "and by Jove! much obliged to him as I was then, I do think that I am more grateful now."

Finding that the shots were not repeated, some twenty or thirty skirmishers were sent into the woods, but returned in ten minutes without finding any trace of the man who had shot the major. The lieutenant now took the command, there was a continuation of the halt for ten minutes while the major was hastily buried by the road side, a rough cross being put up to mark the spot, and a deep cross cut made in the two nearest trees, so that, even if the cross were overthrown the place of the burial might be found afterwards, if necessary. Then the corps marched on again. The first use which the lieutenant made of his authority, even before giving directions for the burial, was to order the cords of the prisoners to be cut. Then the corps continued its march, and by the brightened faces of the men it could be seen easily enough how unpopular their late commander had been, and that they cherished but slight animosity against the slayer. In a short time they struck up one of their marching songs, and prisoners as they were, the Barclays could not but admire the steady martial bearing of the men, as they strode along, making the woods echo with the deep chorus. In three hours' march they reached the village which the troops had left the evening before, to surprise the franc-tireurs, having, as Ralph had learned from the lieutenant in command, received information from a spy of their arrival at the village, late at night, and having started at once under his guidance.

Here a considerable German force was assembled.

The prisoners were not unkindly treated, but Tim Doyle was of course separated from them. Some astonishment was expressed at their youth, but it was assumed that they had been pupils at St. Cyr or the Polytechnic, many of whom received commissions, owing to the impossibility of finding officers for the immense new levies. Several of the officers came in to chat with them, and as these had been also engaged in the fights ten days before, there were many questions to ask upon either side. The boys learned that they would be sent on next day, would be marched to Luneville, and sent thence by train.

"They are a fine set of fellows," Ralph said when their last visitor had left them. "Good officers, unquestionably ; and when they are nice, capital fellows. I can't make out why they should be so brutal as soldiers, for they are undoubtedly a kindly race."

"No doubt," Percy said, but he was thinking of other matters, and not paying much attention to his brother. "Do you think we have any chance of making our escape, Ralph ?"

"Oh, we shall escape fast enough," Ralph answered confidently. "With our knowledge of German, and looking so young, there can be no great difficulty about it when we once get to the end of our journey, but it's no use our thinking about it at present ; we shall be a good deal too closely looked after. I only hope they will send us to Mayence or Coblenz, and not to one of the fortresses at the other end of Germany. Mind, we must not give our parole."

The next day, when they were summoned to start, they found that there were fifty or sixty other prisoners who

had been brought in from other directions. Some belonged to line regiments, but the greater portion by far were Mobiles, who in the retreat of General Cambriel, had been cut off or left behind, and after hiding in the woods for some days were being gradually found and brought in. The Barclays were the only officers. They therefore took their places at the head of the prisoners, who formed four deep, with an escort of Uhlans, and set off on their march.

It was four days' march, the weather was cold and clear, and the Barclays were but little fatigued when they marched into Luneville. The greater part of the prisoners were however in a pitiable condition. Some were so footsore that they could hardly put one foot before the other, others tottered with fatigue, and the men of the escort frequently used the flats of their swords to compel them to keep together.

As they marched through the streets of Luneville the people in the streets uncovered, and the women waved their hands to them, and pressed forward and offered them fruit and bread, in spite of the orders of the escort. They were taken straight to the railway station, where they were put into a shed. Ralph and Percy had gained the good-will of the sergeant in command of the escort by the manner in which they had aided him, by interpreting to the rest of the prisoners, and by doing their best to cheer them up, and take things smooth ; and they now asked him to request the officer in command at the railway station to allow them to walk about until the train started, on parole. The request was, upon the favourable report of the sergeant, granted at once, and

they were told that no train would go off until next morning, and that they might sleep in the town if they chose. Thanking the officer for the permission, they went out of the station, when a tall, big-bearded German sergeant stopped before them.

"Donner wetter!" he exclaimed, "So here you are again!"

The boys gave a little start, for they recognized at once the sergeant who had so closely questioned them in the cabaret upon the night when they had carried off and hung the schoolmaster. Ralph saw at once the importance of conciliating the man, as a report from him of the circumstances might render their position a most unpleasant one, and even in the event of nothing worse coming of it, would almost ensure their captivity in some prison upon the farther side of Prussia, instead of at one of the frontier fortresses.

"Ah, sergeant, how are you?" he said, gaily. "It is our fate, you see, to be made prisoners. You were very nearly taking us, and now here we are."

"A nice trick you played me," the sergeant said, surlily, "with your woodcutters, and your lame brother and your sick sister, and your cask of beer. I got a nice reprimand over that affair."

"Come, sergeant," Ralph said, laughing; "let bygones be bygones. All is fair in war, you know, and we did not touch a single hair of any of your men's heads. All we wanted was the schoolmaster. It would not do you any good to talk about it now, and it might do us harm. It's quite bad enough for us as it is."

"You're nice boys, you are," the sergeant said, with

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his face relaxing into a smile. "To think of my being taken in by two lads like you; well, you did it well, monstrously well, I will say, for you never flinched an eyelash. So you are officers after all. I never suspected any thing about it till three hours afterwards, when we went to relieve the sentry, and found him lying there tied up like a bundle. We couldn't think even then what it meant, for you had made no attack, and it wasn't till morning that we found that the old schoolmaster had been fetched out of bed and carried off on the heads of twenty men. Well, it was well done, and I bear you no malice."

"That's right, sergeant; now come and have a jug of beer with us, you know we had one with you before. Don't you remember we drank to the health of King William? if you like, you shall return the pledge, by drinking to Napoleon."

The sergeant laughed, "I'll do that," he said. "You said, if you remember, when I proposed the king, that you did not wish to hear of his death, and I can say the same for your Napoleon, especially," he added, with a chuckle, "as he's our prisoner."

The boys went into a cabaret near and drank a glass of beer with the sergeant, and then, saying "Good-bye" very heartily, left him, and went into the town, well pleased to have got so well out of a scrape, which might have been a very unpleasant one. They slept at an hotel, and were down at the station at the appointed time. It was a long journey, thirty-six hours, to Mayence. But the boys were too pleased, when they saw the line that the train was following, to have cared had it been

twice as far. The difficulties of escape from the western fortresses would have been immense, whereas at Mayence they were comparatively close to the frontier. At Mayence, too, the position of the prisoners was comfortable. They were allowed to live any where in the town, and to take their meals when they chose; they were obliged twice a day to answer at the muster-roll, and were not, of course, allowed to go outside the fortifications.

The one drawback to the position of the French officers was the utterly insufficient sum which the Prussian Government allowed them for board and lodging. Only forty-five francs a month; that is to say, fifteen pence a day. It is needless to say that the officers who had nothing else to depend upon literally starved upon this pittance, which was the more inexcusable, that the French Government allowed more than twice this sum to the German officers who were taken prisoners. Upon this head, however, the boys had no discomfort. They had plenty of money in their pockets for present uses, and they knew that they could obtain further supplies by writing home, *via* Switzerland. They were, therefore, unaffectedly glad when the train came to a stop at the station of Mayence, and the order was given for all to alight.



CHAPTER XIII.

THE ESCAPE.

THE first thing that the Barclays did, after reporting themselves, was to settle themselves in a lodging, no very easy thing to find, for the town was crowded with troops and prisoners. However, as they were able to pay a higher sum than the great majority of French officers in their position, they had no very great difficulty in finding a place to suit them. The rooms were purposely taken in a large house with a staircase common to a number of families living on different floors, so that any one going in or out would be less likely to be noticed than in a smaller house. They were also careful in choosing rooms so placed that they could go in and out of the door on to the staircase without being noticed by the people with whom they lodged. Ralph's arm was now extremely painful, the long march having inflamed the wound. He had, therefore, on reporting himself, begged that a surgeon might attend him, and had also asked, as a great favour, that his servant, the hussar Doyle, might be allowed to remain with him,

stating that in that case he would pay for his lodgings and provide him with food. As the prison in which the private soldiers were confined was at the time crowded, the request was complied with.

For the next week Ralph suffered greatly with his arm, and had to keep his room ; after that the inflammation subsided, and in another fortnight he was able to dispense, for the first time since he received his wound, with a sling. In the meantime he had made the acquaintance of the people with whom he lodged, who were very kind to their wounded lodger, and whose hearts he completely won by being able to chat to them in their native tongue like one of themselves. The family consisted of a father, who was away all day at the railway station, where he was a clerk, the mother, a garrulous old woman, and a daughter, a pretty blue-eyed girl of about Ralph's age, who assisted her mother to wait upon them. She had a lover away as a soldier in the army besieging Paris, and the thought that he might be wounded or taken prisoner made her very pitiful to the young officers.

Ralph Barclay had for some days been intending to sound her as to her willingness to aid them, when she herself began it one day. She had cleared away their dinner and was standing, as she often did, talking with them, when she lowered her voice, so as not to be overheard by her mother in the next room,—

“I wonder you don't try to get away. Lots of French officers have done so.”

“That is just what we are thinking of, Christine ; we have only been waiting till my arm was out of a sling, and we want you to help us.”

"How can I help you?" the girl asked.

"In the first place you can buy us clothes; it would excite suspicion if we were to buy them ourselves. Percy and I were thinking of going as girls—not pretty girls, of course, like you, Christine—but great rough peasant girls."

Christine laughed and coloured. "You would be too tall," she said.

"We should be rather tall," Ralph said ruefully. "We have grown so horribly in the last few months. Still some women are as tall as we are."

"Yes, some women are," Christine said; "but men look after them and say, 'what big, gawky women!' and you don't want to be looked after; if people did so, they would see that you didn't walk one bit like a woman, and that your shoulders were very wide, and your arms very strong, and—oh, no! it wouldn't do at all. I must think it over. I suppose you want that great blue-coated bear to go?" and she nodded at Tim Doyle, who, not being able to speak a word of her language, was always indulging in the most absurd pantomime of love and devotion, causing screams of laughter to the merry German girl.

"Yes, Tim must go, too, Christine."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the girl. "Fancy him as a woman."

"What is she saying about me, Mister Percy?"

"She says you would make a very pretty woman, Tim."

"Tare and ages, Mister Percy," Tim said, taking it quite seriously. "How could I do it at all? I'd have to shave off all my beautiful beard and moustaches, and even then I doubt if you would mistake me for a woman."

The boys screamed with laughter, and translated the Irishman's speech to Christine, who laughed so that her mother came into the room.

"Look here, children," she said smiling, "I don't want to know what you are talking about. If any thing of any sort happens, I may be asked questions, and I don't want to have to tell stories. I can't help hearing if you leave the door open and laugh so, indeed all the neighbourhood might hear it, so please shut the door in future."

So saying she again went back to her work in the next room. "Good-bye, I'm going, too," Christine said. "I will think it over by to-morrow morning and tell you what you are to do."

The next morning the boys were very anxious to hear Christine's proposals, for although they had quite made up their minds to try their own plan if hers was not feasible, still they felt that with her knowledge of the country she was likely at any rate to give them good advice.

Until she had cleared away breakfast Christine said nothing ; then she took out her knitting and sat against the window.

"Now," she began, "I will tell you what I have thought of. It would be easy enough if it was not for him. He's so big and so red, and he doesn't speak German. Oh dear, he's very tiresome," and she shook her head at Tim, who smiled, laid his hand on his breast, and endeavoured to look affecting. Christine laughed.

"The only thing I can think of for him is that he shall go out as a Jew pedlar, with one of their broad hats and

a tray of little trinkets. He might pass if none of the soldiers took it into their heads to buy."

The proposition was translated to Tim Doyle. "Is it me, your honour, me, Tim Doyle, a good Catholic, and come of honest people, that's to turn myself into a haythin Jew?" the Irishman burst out with great indignation, "It was bad enough that I should be made into a woman, but a haythin Jew! I put it to your honours it's nayther sinsible nor dacent."

The boys went off in screams of laughter. Christine laughed for a moment too, when they translated Tim's speech to her, and then looked indignant that the proposition which had cost her so much thought should be so scornfully rejected.

Tim saw the look, and at once went on persuasively, "Sure, now, darlint Miss Christine, don't be angry wid me out of your bright blue eyes! But is it reasonable—is it natural to ask a Christian man to make a haythin Jew of himself? Would you like it yourself?"

When the boys could stop laughing they translated Tim's appeal.

"Did you ever see such an absurd man?" she said, laughing. "As if it could make any difference to his religion. Tell him I am a good Catholic too, but I should not mind dressing up as a Jewess."

"Sure, thin, darlint," Tim exclaimed, when her speech was translated, "I will go as a Jew directly, if you'll go with me and be my Jewess."

Christine laughed, blushed, shook her head, and said, "Nonsense!" upon hearing Tim's proposition.

"But seriously, Christine," Ralph said, "the objection

which you mention to the Jew pedlar's disguise is important. Full as the streets are of soldiers looking about, he could hardly hope to go from here through the streets and out at the gate without some one asking him about the contents of his box."

Christine allowed, a little pettishly at the failure of her plan, that it certainly was likely.

"The real difficulty is to get outside the gate," Ralph said thoughtfully. "After that I should have no fear."

"What are you thinking of doing, then?" Christine asked.

"I was thinking of dressing Percy and myself in the clothes of young peasants, and putting Tim into something of the same sort, with a great bandage round his face. Then I should say that we were two lads from some place near the frontier who had come here to meet our uncle, who had had his jaw shattered in battle. That would explain Tim's not being able to talk at all, and as to looks, he is red enough for a German anywhere."

"Yes," Christine said, "that would do very well; but of course you would be liable to be asked for papers."

"Of course," Ralph said. "But we must risk something."

"I have an idea," Christine said suddenly, clapping her hands. "I have some cousins living at Wiesbaden. These are three boys, and I am sure they would do any thing for me. I will go out to Wiesbaden to-morrow and ask them to lend me their papers just for one day. Wiesbaden is not your way at all, but for that very reason you would get out more easily there, and be less likely to be suspected or followed. You could cross the Rhine some-

where near St. Goar. I shall have to tell some sad stories to my cousins, and coax them a great deal ; still, I daresay I shall succeed, and then you can go boldly across the bridge and into the railway station, and take a ticket for Wiesbaden. You can have an envelope ready directed, and put the papers into the post there."

"The very thing, Christine. You are a darling!" Ralph exclaimed, catching her by the waist, and kissing her before she had time to think of resistance.

"I sha'n't do anything at all for you," Christine said, laughing and blushing, "if you misbehave in that way."

"I couldn't help it, Christine, not even if your mother had been looking on. And now about our clothes."

"I couldn't buy them," Christine said. "I never could go into a shop and buy men's clothes."

The thing was so evident that for a moment the boys' looks fell. Then Christine said, colouring very much, "There is a box in my room of Karl's things. He is my cousin, you know, and he was working as a gardener here till he had to go out in the Landwehr, so of course he left his things here for us to take care of. He is about your size. I will take out one suit. It won't hurt it, and you can put it on and go out into the town, and buy the things for all three of you."

"Capital!" the boys exclaimed. "It couldn't be better."

Ten minutes afterwards Ralph went down the stairs and out into the street dressed as a German labourer in his best suit. He was a little uneasy at first, but no one noticed him, and he was soon in a shop haggling over the price of a peasant's coat, as if the matter of a thaler

one way or other was a thing of vital importance to him. He bought the three suits at three different shops, as he thought that it would look suspicious if he were to get them all at the same, and in an hour was back again.

An hour afterwards Christine started for Wiesbaden.

The Barclays had reason to congratulate themselves that they had not longer deferred their preparations for escape, for when presenting themselves as usual that afternoon at the roll call they were told that they must hold themselves in readiness to leave for one of the eastern fortresses upon the following evening, as another large batch of prisoners from Metz were expected to arrive upon the following day.

In the evening Christine returned from Wiesbaden, which is distant only a quarter of an hour by rail from Mayence.

"I have got them," she said, "but if you only knew the trouble I have had! What a bother boys are, to be sure!"

"Especially cousins—eh, Christine?"

"Especially cousins," Christine said, demurely. After thanking her very warmly for her kindness, the Barclays started out and bought a variety of things which they thought might be useful. They also bought a pretty gold watch and chain to give to Christine as a parting present.

The next morning they answered as usual to their early roll call, and then returning at once to their lodgings, changed their clothes for those which Ralph had purchased. It was agreed that they should not say good-bye to Christine's mother, in order that, whatever she might suspect, she might be able to say that she knew

nothing of any idea on the part of her lodgers to make their escape. Then Christine herself came in to say good-bye, and went half wild with delight at the present ; then she said good-bye, kissed the boys without any affectation of objecting to it, and then went to a window to watch if they went safely down the street.

The boys had no uneasiness whatever upon their own account, for they had before passed so easily among the Prussian troops that they felt quite confident in their disguise, but they were uncomfortable as to Tim, whose inability to answer questions would have at once betrayed them had any one addressed him. They had not ventured to bandage up his face as if wounded, as he would have naturally in that case had a military pass. As the best thing they could think of, they had shoved a large lump of cotton into one of his cheeks, which gave him the appearance of having a swelled face, and had instructed him to frequently put his hand up to it as if in great pain. Tim had plenty of shrewdness, and acted his part admirably. They passed across the bridge of boats without question, and into the railway station, which is just opposite its end. Here soldiers and other officials swarmed, but the three walked along carelessly, the two boys chatting together in German, Tim walking with his hand up to his face, and giving an occasional stamp of pain. He sat down with Percy on a seat in the station, while Ralph went to the little window where tickets were being delivered. There were a good many people waiting, and when it came to Ralph's turn, and he put the papers in at the window and asked for three third-class tickets to Wiesbaden, the clerk

scarcely glanced at them, but handed the tickets over without a question.

They then went into the third class waiting-room and sat down. There were a good many peasants and others there ; and when the doors opened for them to go on to the platform and enter the carriages, they saw it was hopeless to try and get a carriage to themselves. They did, therefore, the best they could, putting Tim next to the window, while Percy sat next to and Ralph opposite to him. The rest of the compartment was filled with country people.

“He seems in great pain,” a good-natured peasant woman said to Ralph, as Tim rocked himself backwards and forwards in his anguish.

“Yes, he is very bad,” Ralph said.

“Toothache?” asked the woman.

“Worse than that,” Ralph said gravely ; “an abscess in the jaw. He has just been to the hospital.”

“Poor fellow !” the woman said. “Why does he not poultice it? I should advise you to poultice,” she said, addressing Tim.

Tim gave a grunt, which might have meant anything, and Ralph said in a whisper, “Don’t talk to him. Poor uncle, he is so bad-tempered now, it puts him in a rage if any one speaks to him, because it hurts him so to answer. At ordinary times he is very good-tempered, but now, oh !”—and Ralph made a little pantomime to express the extreme badness of Tim’s temper.

“You are not of Wiesbaden are you?” the woman asked. “I do not know you by sight.”

“No,” Ralph said ; “we are from Holzhausen, a

village some eight miles upon the other side of Wiesbaden."

"Ah!" the woman said, "I have a sister living there; surely you must know her. She is the wife of Klopstock, the carpenter."

"Surely," Ralph said; "she is my neighbour, every one knows her. She is very like you."

"Well, now, you are the first person who has ever said that," the woman said, surprised. "I am so short, and she is so tall."

"Yes, she is tall—very tall," Ralph said very gravely; "but there is something about the expression of your eyes which reminds me of Mrs. Klopstock. Yes, the more I look at you the more I see it," and Ralph looked so earnestly at the woman that Percy had the greatest difficulty in preventing himself going off into a shout of laughter. "I wonder I have never seen you at Holzhausen," Ralph continued.

"Well," the woman said, "it is years since I have been there. You see, it is a long way, and my sister often comes into Wiesbaden, and I see her; but in truth her husband and I don't get on very well together. You know his temper is ——," and she lifted up her hands.

"Yes, indeed," Ralph said; "his temper is as you say terrible. Between ourselves, it is so well known that we have a saying, 'As bad-tempered as Klopstock, the carpenter;' one can't say more than that; but we are at Wiesbaden. Good morning."

"Good morning. I hope your uncle's tooth will be better ere long."

"I hope so, indeed, for all our sakes," Ralph said. "He is as bad as Klopstock at present."

So saying they got out of the train, and walked into the town. When they had separated from the crowd, Percy could restrain himself no longer, and went off into a scream of laughter.

"What is it, Mister Percy?" Tim asked, opening his lips for the first time since they had left the house.

"O, Tim, if you had but heard!" Percy said, when he recovered his voice. "Do you know you are as bad-tempered as Klopstock, the carpenter?"

"Sure and I never heard tell of him, Master Percy; and if I have been bad-tempered, I haven't said much about it; and if the carpenter had a wad of cotton as big as a cricket-ball in one cheek as I have, it's small blame to him if he was out of temper."

Both the boys laughed this time, and then Ralph explained the whole matter to Tim, who laughed more heartily than either of them.

"Which way shall we go, Ralph?"

"I looked at the map the last thing before starting, Percy, and I noticed that the road went out past the gambling place. I dare not take out the map again to look at the plan of the town; it would look too suspicious, so let us wander about till we find the place. It has large grounds, so we cannot miss it."

They were not long in finding the place they were looking for. There was no mistaking it, with its long arcades leading up to the handsome conversation rooms, its piece of water, and its beautifully laid-out grounds.

“I should like to go in and have a look at it,” Percy said; “I can hear the band playing now.”

“So should I,” Ralph said, “but time is too precious. They will find out at the muster this afternoon that we are missing, and as we answered this morning, they will know that we cannot have got far. We had better put as many miles between us as we can. First of all, though, let us put those papers Christine got us into the envelope, and drop them into that post-box. We should not do badly either to buy three dark coloured blankets before we start. It is terribly cold, and we shall want them at night.”

They therefore turned up into the town again, and then Ralph separated from the others and went in and bought the blankets. Ten minutes later they were walking along at a steady pace from the town. Each carried a stick, the boys carried theirs upon their shoulder, with a bundle containing a change of clothes, and other articles slung upon it. Tim carried his bundle in one hand, and walked using his stick in the other. When a short distance out of the town they stopped in a retired place, and put some strips of plaister upon Tim's cheeks, and wrapped up his face with a white bandage. It was, as he said, “mighty uncomfortable,” but as he was now able to dispense with the ball of cotton in his mouth, he did not so much mind it.

The day was bitterly cold, for it was now the beginning of the second week of November, but the party strode on, full of the consciousness of freedom. They met but few people upon their way, and merely exchanged a brief good day with those they did meet. They had brought some bread and cold meat with them from Mayence, and

therefore had no need to go into any shops at the villages they passed. They did not dare to sleep in a house, as it was certain that some official would inquire for their papers, and therefore when it became dark they turned off from a road and made for a wood at a short distance from it. Here they ate their supper, laid a blanket on the ground, put the bundles down for pillows, and lay down close together, putting the other two blankets over them.

"It's mighty cold," Tim said, "but we might be worse."

"It's better than a prison in Pomerania, by a long way," Ralph answered. "By the look of the sky and the dropping of the wind, I think we shall have snow before morning."

At daybreak next morning they were up, but it was some little time before they could start, so stiffened were their limbs with the cold. Ralph's prognostication as to the weather had turned out right, and a white coating of snow lay over the country. They now set off, and walked for an hour, when they arrived at a large village. Here it was agreed they should go in and buy something to eat. They entered the ale-house, and called for bread, cheese, and beer. The landlord brought it, and, as they expected, entered into conversation with them. After the first remarks on the sharpness of the weather, Ralph produced a tin of portable soup, and asked the landlord if he would have it heated for their uncle.

"He cannot, as you see, eat solid food," Ralph said, "he had his jaw broken by a shell at Worth."

"Poor fellow!" the landlord said, hastening away with

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the soup. "Are you going far?" he asked on his return.

"To St. Goar," Ralph said.

"But why does he walk?" the landlord asked; "he could have been sent home by train."

"Of course he could," Ralph said. "We walked over to see him, and intended to have walked back again, but when the time came for us to start, he said he would come too. The surgeon said he was not fit to go. Uncle had made up his mind to be off, and as the surgeon would not give him an order, he started to walk. He says it does not hurt him so much as the jolting of the train, and we shall be home to breakfast."

An hour later they arrived at St. Goarshaus. They were now quite out of the track which prisoners escaping from Mayence would be likely to take, and had not the slightest difficulty in getting a boat to cross the Rhine.

"How beautiful the river is here," Percy said.

"Yes it is, indeed," Ralph answered, "I believe that this is considered one of the most lovely spots on the whole river. I can't say that I think that that railway opposite improves it."

They landed at St. Goar, and tramped gaily on to Castellan, and slept in a barn near that village.

The next morning they were off before daybreak, and eight miles farther crossed the Moselle at Zell. They left the road before they arrived at Alf, for they were now approaching the great road between Coblenz and the south, and might come upon bodies of troops upon the march or halting, and might be asked troublesome questions. They therefore struck upon a country lane, and

keeping among the hills crossed the main road between Bertrich and Wittlech, and slept in a copse near Dudeldf. They had walked five-and-thirty miles and were so dead beat that even the cold did not keep them awake. Next morning they got a fresh supply of bread and cheese at a tiny village between Dudeldf and Bittburg, and leaving the latter place to the left, made straight for the frontier across the hills. The road to the frontier ran through Bittburg, but they were afraid of keeping to it, as there were sure to be troops at the frontier. Several times they lost their way, but the pocket compass and map which they had brought with them stood them in good stead, and late in the evening they arrived at the stream which forms the frontier. It was fortunately very low, for the cold had frozen up its sources, they had therefore little difficulty in crossing, and, tired as they were, gave a cheer upon finding themselves in Luxembourg.

They tramped along merrily until they came to a cottage, where they boldly entered, and were received with the greatest kindness and hospitality. The Luxembourg people at once feared and hated Prussia, and were delighted to do anything in their power for the escaped prisoners. The peasant made a blazing fire, and some hot coffee, and the tired travellers felt what a blessing it was to sit down without listening every moment for the step of an enemy. The peasants told them, however, that they were not yet altogether safe, for that owing to the complaints of Prussia, both the Dutch and Belgian Governments were arresting and detaining escaped prisoners passing through their territories. After some

discussion the boys agreed that next morning they should dress themselves in the change of clothes they had brought, which were ordinary shooting suits, and should leave their other clothes behind, and then walk as far as Spa, twenty miles to the north. They would excite no suspicion in the minds of any one who saw them arrive, as they would merely be taken for three Englishmen staying at one of the numerous hotels there returning from a walk. Their feet, however, were so much swollen the next morning that they were glad to remain another day quiet in the cottage, and the following day they started and walked gaily into Spa.

After strolling about the place some time they went to the railway station at the time the evening train started for Brussels, asked for tickets in very English French, and at eleven o'clock at night entered Brussels. Here their troubles were over, a good night's rest in a good hotel completely set them up again, and the next morning they left by train for Dunkirk. There they reported themselves to the French officer in command, and received permission to go on board a Government steamer, which was to leave the next morning for Cherbourg.



CHAPTER XIV.

A PERILOUS EXPEDITION.

UPON the eleventh of November the boys arrived at Tours. They had started for that place as the national head-quarters, the moment they arrived at Cherbourg. At Tours men's hopes were high, for a week before Aurelles de Paladine had driven back Von der Tann, and reoccupied Orleans. Every hour fresh troops were arriving and passing forwards. The town was literally thronged with soldiers of all sorts, batteries of artillery, regiments of cavalry, squadrons of Arab Spahis looking strangely out of place in their white robes and unmoved countenance in this scene of European warfare, franc-tireurs in every possible variety of absurd and unsuitable uniform. In all this din and confusion the young Barclays felt quite bewildered. The first thing was evidently to get new uniforms, then to report themselves. There was no difficulty about the former matter, for every tailor in Tours had for the time being turned military outfitter, and by dint of offering to pay extra,

their uniforms were promised for the next morning. That matter settled, they determined to go at once to the prefecture and report themselves. As they turned out of the crowded Rue Royal, they received two hearty slaps on the shoulder which almost knocked them down, while a hearty voice exclaimed, "My dear boys, I am glad to see you."

They looked round, and to their astonishment and delight saw Colonel Tempé. For a minute or two the hand-shakings and greetings were so hearty that no questions could be asked.

"I thought a German prison would not hold you long, boys," the colonel said. "I saw your father as I came through Dijon, and I said to him that I should be surprised if you did not turn up soon, especially when I heard from him that you were at Mayence, only two days' tramp from the frontier."

"But what are you doing here, Colonel?"

"Just at present I am working at head-quarters. Between ourselves, the army of the east is coming round to join Aurelles. Our poor fellows were pretty nearly used up, and I found that I could do little real good with the other corps. So I gave up the command, and was sent here to confer with Gambetta, and he has kept me. Now what are you going to do?"

"We were going to report ourselves, colonel."

"No use going to-day, too late; come and dine with me at the Bordeaux. Have you got rooms?"

"Not yet, Colonel."

"Then I can tell you you won't get them at all. The place is crowded, not a bed to be had for love or money.

I've got rooms by the greatest good luck. One of you can have the sofa, the other an arm-chair or the hearth-rug, whichever suits you best."

"Thank you very much, we shall do capitally," the boys said. "And now, have you any news from Paris?"

"We have no late news from Paris; but worse still, the news gets very slowly and irregularly into Paris. The pigeons seem to get bewildered with the snow, or else the Prussians shoot them."

"But surely, with such an immense circle to guard, there could be no great difficulty in a messenger finding his way in."

"There is a difficulty, and a very great one," Colonel Tempé said, "for of all who have tried, only one or two have succeeded; now come along, or we shall be late for dinner."

It was a curious medley at the table d'hôte at the Hotel de Bordeaux. Generals with their breasts covered with orders, and simple franc-tireurs; officers of every arm of the service, ministers and members of the late Corps Legislatif; an American gentleman with his family, English newspaper correspondents, army contractors, and families refugees from Paris. After dinner they went to a café literally crowded with officers, and thence to Colonel Tempé's room, where they sat down quietly to chat over what had taken place since the last visit.

"But where is your Irishman? your father told me he was with you; I suppose you could not get him out."

"Oh yes, Tim's here," Ralph said, laughing, "but he ran across a couple of Irishmen belonging to the foreign

legion, and as he would have been in our way, and we did not know where we were going to sleep, we gave him leave till to-morrow morning, when he is to meet us in front of the railway station."

"By the way, boys, I suppose you know you have each got a step?"

"No," the boys cried. "Really?"

"Yes, really," the colonel said. "That good fellow Cambriels sent in a strong report in your favour upon resigning his command, rehearsing what you did with us, and requesting that the step might be at once given to you; as a matter of course it was in the next Gazette."

"Of course we feel pleased, Colonel, but it seems absurd, so young as we are; why if we go on like this, in another six months we may be majors."

"In ordinary times it would be absurd, lads, and it would not be possible for you to hold the grade you do now, still less higher ones, unless you understood thoroughly your duty. At the present moment every thing is exceptional. A man who perhaps only served a few months in the army years ago is made a general, and sent to organize a camp of new levies. Of course he could not command these troops in the field, could not even drill them on the parade ground. But that is of no matter. He has a talent for organization, and therefore is selected to organize the camp, and to enable him to do so efficiently he receives the nominal rank of general. In ordinary times a man could not get promoted three or even four times in as many weeks, over the heads of hundreds of others, without causing an immense amount of jealousy, without in fact upsetting the

whole traditions of the army. Now, it is altogether different. The officers of the regular army are almost all prisoners. Every one is new, every one is unaccustomed to his work, and men who show themselves to be good men can be rewarded and promoted with exceptional rapidity without exciting any feeling of jealousy whatever. Besides which, the whole thing is provisional. When the war is over every one will either go back into private life, or, if they continue to serve, will be gazetted into the regular army according to some scale or other to be hereafter determined upon. Some inconveniences no doubt will arise, but they will hardly be serious. I was offered a general's rank a month ago, but I declined it, as it would have entailed either my undertaking duties for which I am unfit, as setting to to organize young levies, and giving up active service. No, if you go on as you have hitherto done, boys, you may be colonels in another six months; for when a name is recommended for promotion for good service by a general, you may well suppose there is no question asked as to his age. Of course no general would recommend you as captains to command companies in a regiment, because you are altogether ignorant of a captain's duty; but you are quite capable of filling the duties of captain on the staff, as those duties require only clear-headedness, pluck, attention, and common-sense. What I should like to win, even more than a company, were I in your place, would be a commander's cross in the legion of honour. I had the cross years ago, but I only had the commander's cross a fortnight ago, for the bridge of Vesouze."

“Ah! yes;” Ralph said, “that would be worth winning, but that is hopeless.”

Colonel Tempé was silent. Ralph and Percy looked at him. “You mean,” Ralph said, after a pause, “that there is a chance somehow of our winning it.”

“Well, boys,” Colonel Tempé said, “I don’t know that I am right in leading you into danger, but I do think that you might win it. I was mentioning your names only yesterday to Gambetta. A despatch had just come in from Paris, grumbling at receiving no news from the country, and Gambetta was lamenting over the impossibility of arranging for simultaneous movements, owing to the break-down of the pigeons, and the failure of the messengers; when I said, there were two young English fellows with us in the Vosges, they were on Cambriel’s staff last, and are now prisoners, who, if they were here, would, I believe, get in if any one could. They went down over and over again among the Germans, and I could lay any money that they would succeed. ‘How did they get taken prisoners?’ Gambetta asked, as sharp as a knife. ‘By no fault of their own,’ I answered; they went out on leave to see me, and slept with a party of franc-tireurs, where they of course had no authority as to sentries, and the party was surprised at night and completely cut up. They were taken prisoners, but I do not expect that they will remain so for long.’ Gambetta did not say any thing then, but when I left him, an hour afterwards, he remarked, ‘If you hear of those young fellows you were speaking of, having returned, send them to me, Tempé.’”

Ralph looked at Percy, and checked the offer to go,

which he saw was on his brother's lip. "I think it might be done, colonel," he said quietly; "but it is a serious matter, and we will think it over before we give an opinion."

Ralph then changed the subject, and they talked over the events which had happened in the Vosges, the strategy and manœuvres of General Michel, the arrival of Garibaldi, the doings of the franc-tireurs, etc.

"By the way," the colonel said, "there was a telegram in this evening, just as I left the office, that the Germans occupied Dijon yesterday."

"You don't say so," the boys said, jumping from their seats. "Was there any fighting?"

"Yes; some Mobiles and franc-tireurs made a very plucky defence outside the town. Owing to some gross mismanagement, the great bulk of the troops had been withdrawn only the day before. After two or three hours' fighting our men fell back, the Prussians, as usual, shelled the town, and the authorities surrendered."

"The fighting could not have been our side of the town," Ralph said thoughtfully.

"No, just the other side," Colonel Tempé said; "as my wife is still at home, and our place is not many hundred yards from yours, that was the first thing I thought of."

"I wonder if papa was in the fight?" Percy said, anxiously.

"I should think it probable, boys, that my old friend would have gone out, but I do not think that you need be uneasy about it, for from what the telegram said our loss was small. The troops fell back into the town, and

retreated unmolested through it. So your father would no doubt have changed his things in the town, and have walked quietly back again. He had volunteered into the national guards when I came last through Dijon, and was hard at work drilling them. Of course he had his old rank of Captain."

At ten o'clock the boys said that they would go for a stroll before laying down for the night. They were out upwards of an hour, and returned at the end of that time with serious but resolved faces. The colonel was out when they returned, and found them stretched on the sofa and hearthrug when he came in. They gave him a sleepy good-night, and no other word was exchanged.

In the morning they were up at eight o'clock; Colonel Tempé was already dressed, and they went out together to get their coffee and milk. As they were taking it, Ralph told him that they had made up their minds to make the attempt to enter Paris with despatches, but that they saw but one way to do so, and that unless they could be furnished with the necessary papers they should abandon all idea of the enterprise. Ten minutes later they entered the prefecture. Colonel Tempé went in at once to see Gambetta, while the boys remained in the ante-room. In ten minutes their friend came out again, and beckoned to them to come into the next room.

"These are Lieutenants Barclay," he said. The boys bowed, and examined, with attentive curiosity, the man who was at that time the absolute ruler of France. A dark man, with a short black beard, keen eyes, and a look of self-reliance and energy: a man who committed endless mistakes, but who was the life and soul of the

French resistance: a man to whom, had he lived in olden times, the Romans would have erected a statue, because, in her deepest misfortunes, he never despaired of the Republic.

He looked keenly at the young men. "Colonel Tempé tells me that you have rendered very great service by going among the enemy in disguise, and that you are willing to make an attempt to carry despatches into Paris."

"We are ready to try," Ralph said, respectfully; "but after talking it over in every way, we can see but one disguise which would enable us to penetrate the enemy's lines near enough to the ground between the two armies to render an attempt possible, and even that disguise will be useless unless we can procure certain papers."

"What is your plan?" M. Gambetta asked.

"We intend to go as German Jews," Ralph said. "The Prussians strip all the clocks, pictures, and furniture of any value from the villas they occupy, and send them back to Germany. There are a number of Jews who follow the army, and either buy these stolen goods from them, or undertake to convey them back to Germany at a certain price. Several of these Jews, with their waggons full of clocks and other articles, have been captured by our franc-tireurs or troops, and no doubt papers of some kind have been found upon them. These papers would naturally be sent here. If we could be provided with them, we could, I have little doubt, penetrate their lines."

"An excellent idea," the minister said. "I have no doubt that we have such papers." And he struck a small hand bell on the table. An attendant entered. "Tell

Captain Verré I wish to speak to him." "Captain Verré," he said, when that officer entered, "there were some papers came last week from General Faidherbe, relative to those waggons laden with clocks, ladies' dresses, and so on, that were captured near Mezieres. Just look through them, and see if there were any German permits for the bearers to pass freely for the purpose of trading. If so, let me have them at once."

The officer at once left the room.

"Supposing, as I have no doubt, that we can give you the papers, what is your course?"

"Speed is naturally an essential," Ralph said. "We shall disguise ourselves at once, and, upon receipt of the despatches, start from here to Orleans by train, with two good horses, which can, of course, be furnished us. We shall ride through the forest of Orleans, and so to Montargis, cross the Loign there, and make straight for Melun, keeping always through bye lanes. As far as we know, there are no large bodies of the enemy along that line. When we get near the town, we shall leave our horses with some village maire, or give them to a farmer, and walk into the place boldly. You will furnish us with a note to the maire of Melun, as well as a circular to all French authorities, to give us any help, and we shall get him to assist us at once to buy a waggon and two strong horses. With these we shall drive round direct to Versailles. Our pass will admit us into the town without difficulty, and then we shall naturally be guided by circumstances. We must be furnished with a considerable sum of money to make purchases of plunder."

"An admirable plan," said the minister warmly, "and

one that deserves, even should it not obtain, success. I need not speak to you of reward, because, as gentlemen, I know that you make the attempt from the love of honour. Colonel Tempé has before spoken to me of you, and you were highly commended by General Cambriels. Your names will, therefore, be in the next Gazette for the cross of the legion of honour, and if you succeed you will come back captains and commanders of the legion. I may mention, although I know that it will not add to your motive to succeed, that you will be entitled to the reward of 50,000 francs, which has been offered to any one who will carry in despatches to Paris."

At this moment the officer entered. "Here are the papers the Jews with the captured waggons carried," he said. "They are signed by the general at Frankfort, and countersigned by at least a dozen military authorities. There are three of them."

The minister glanced at them. "They will do well," he said. "Will you be ready to start to-morrow morning?"

"Quite ready," Ralph said.

"Very well. Then if you will be here at half-past five the despatches will be ready, written of course so as to fold up in the smallest possible compass. Captain Verré, will you see that two of the best horses in my stable are put into boxes in the train that leaves at six to-morrow morning."

The boys now rose to leave. "Good morning," the minister said. "All the letters of recommendation, the despatches, and the money will be ready when you come in the morning."

The boys, on going out, held a long consultation over their disguises. Examining the papers, they found that one was for two persons of the same name, Isaac Kraph and Aaron Kraph, father and son, the father, as described in the pass, forty-five years old, the son eighteen. This pass they determined to use. The task of changing Percy into a Jew boy of eighteen was evidently an easy one. His clear complexion was the only difficulty, and this could be readily disguised. Ralph's disguise was a more difficult one, and there was a considerable debate as to whether he had better go as a red Jew or a dark Jew. The latter was finally determined upon, as otherwise the contrast between the supposed father and son would be too striking. They then went to their tailor, and found their uniforms ready. They at once put them on, as the peculiarity of the purchases they intended to make was so great, that, had they been in their civilian dress, it was certain that they would have been regarded with suspicion, and would have perhaps had difficulty in obtaining what they wanted.

Their first visit was to a hairdresser's shop. Rather to the astonishment of the proprietor they told him that they wished to speak to him in a private room, and still more to his astonishment, when the door was closed, they told him that they wanted their hair dyed quite black. The hairdresser could hardly believe his ears. The boys had both brown wavy hair, Percy's being the lightest, and that two young officers of the staff should at such a time desire to dye their hair struck the man almost dumb with astonishment.

Ralph smiled. "No wonder you are surprised, but we

have an important mission to carry out, and it is essential that we should be completely disguised. We are going as spies into Von der Tann's camp. This, of course, is in the strictest confidence."

The hairdresser was at once struck with the importance of the occasion.

"You want an instantaneous dye?" he asked.

"Certainly," Ralph said; "and one that will last at any rate for a week." There was no difficulty whatever in complying with the request, and in ten minutes the boys' heads were raven in their blackness.

"Now," Ralph said, "I want my brother's hair, which is fortunately very long, to be completely frizzled; and I want a pair of the tongs you do it with, so as to be able to do it for ourselves.

This also was easy enough.

"Now," Ralph went on, "for myself I want my hair to be very long, to come down over my ears on to my collar all the way round."

"But the only way to do that is to have a wig specially made for you."

"Not at all," Ralph said. "I could not put on a wig even if you had one just as I want it ready; the parting always shows if it is narrowly looked at. I want some long flat bands of hair like those you use for chignons. It must be black to match my hair as it is now, but put a few streaks of grey into it. I must have a band of this hair long enough to go round the head from just above one ear to just above the other. If you part my hair just at the place where the band is to go, brush the hair up, put the band of artificial hair on with shoemaker's wax or

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something else to hold tight, then brush the hair back again over the band, it would be absolutely impossible to see it was not all natural. Then cut the long hair so as to lay on my coat collar, frizzle it and the natural hair, and I will defy the keenest-eyed Prussian to see anything wrong about it."

As soon as the hairdresser understood exactly what Ralph wanted he entered heartily into his plans, and several of the short flat bands of black hair used for chignons were sown on to a band. This was fastened on to Ralph's head in the way he had suggested, the long tresses were cut to the required length, the tongs were used on them and on the natural hair, and plenty of oil put on, and in an hour his head-dress was perfect—an immense bush of frizzly hair. The cloth was taken from round his neck, and as he looked at himself in the glass he joined heartily in Percy's shout of laughter.

"But, Ralph, how are you to go out in your uniform and that head of hair?"

"Dear me," Ralph said; "I had quite forgotten that. Go to the tailor's, Percy, and tell them to send the suit I changed there in here directly."

Percy went off for the clothes, and Ralph then went on,—

"Now I want a black or greyish beard, whiskers and moustache."

"I have not got such a thing," the hairdresser said; "but I know a man who keeps them; I will get it for you in a quarter of an hour."

In a few minutes Percy returned with a boy with Ralph's clothes. In a short time they were ready to start.

"You do look a strange object, Ralph."

“Never mind, Percy, there are plenty of strange objects here ; no one will notice me.”

Then saying that they would call in again in half an hour for the beard, they went to a chemist's, from whom, after some talk, they obtained a mixture to give a slightly brown tinge to their faces. They now dived into the back streets of the town, found a second-hand clothes shop, and speedily got the articles they required. Ralph had a long great coat with a fur collar and a pair of high boots coming up to his knees and to be worn over the trousers ; a black fur cap completed his costume. Percy had a black cap made of rough cloth, with a peak and with flaps to come down over the ears, an old great coat with fur round the pockets and collar, a bright coloured handkerchief to go two or three times round the neck, and high boots like those of Ralph. They then returned to the hairdresser, and Ralph insisted that the beard and moustache should be fastened on not only in the ordinary manner with springs, but with cobbler's wax. “My life,” he said, “might depend upon the things not slipping at any moment.”

They now went home. The moment that they entered their rooms Ralph exclaimed, “Why, we have forgotten all about Tim !”

“So we have,” Percy said. “He was to have met us in front of the railway station at nine o'clock, and, of course, he has no idea where to find us. I will go there: very likely the poor fellow is waiting still.”

Percy hurried off, and found Tim, as he had expected, sitting upon the steps going up to the railway station. He jumped up with a cry of joy upon seeing Percy.

"The Vargin be praised, Mister Percy! I began to think that you must have been sent off somewhere without time to warn me, and I couldn't for the life of me make out what to do."

"We have not gone, Tim," Percy said, not wishing to hurt the attached fellow's feelings by telling him that he had been forgotten; "but we are starting to-morrow. I will tell you all about it when we get in. We have been to see M. Gambetta this morning; and, do you know, we met Colonel Tempé last night, and are stopping in his rooms."

So saying, he walked along at a quick pace towards their lodgings, Tim occasionally glancing a puzzled look at him. By the time they reached the room Ralph had stained his face and hands, and was busy dressing in his disguise. His back was to the door when they entered, but he had heard the Irishman's voice on the stair.

"Well, Tim, how are you?" he said, turning round.

"Howly Vargin!" ejaculated Tim, dropping into a chair, and crossing himself with great fervour. "Sure, I'm bewitched. Here's an ould gentleman, wid a wonderful head of hair, has been staleing Mister Ralph's voice."

The two boys went off in a shout of laughter at Tim's genuine terror.

"Sure, I'm bewitched entirely," he went on. "He laughs for all the world like Mister Ralph. Did ye iver see the like? What is it all, Mister Percy, dear?"

Percy had by this time taken off his cap, and Tim, as he looked him fairly in the face, gave another start.

"By the mother of Moses!" he exclaimed in terror,

“we’re all bewitched. Mister Ralph’s turned into an ould man with a furze-bush of hair, and Mister Percy’s beautiful hair has all turned black and shrivelled itself up. Am I turning myself, I wonder?” and he looked into the glass to see if any change had taken place in his own abundant crop of red hair.

The boys were laughing so that they could not speak for some time, and Tim sat gazing at them in speechless bewilderment. At last Percy by a great effort recovered himself, and explained to him the whole circumstances of the case. The Irishman’s astonishment ceased now, but his dismay was as great as ever.

“Then is it alone you’re going?” he said at last. “Are you going into danger again without taking me with you? You’d never do that surely, Mister Ralph?”

“I am very sorry, Tim, to be separated from you,” Ralph said; “but it is quite impossible for you to go with us. If you understood French and German as well as we do, the case would be different; but as it is, the thing is absolutely impossible. You know how great a trouble it was to disguise you before, and it would treble our anxieties and difficulties. Not only that, but even if, in the face of every possible danger, we got you into Paris with us, there would be great difficulty in getting you out. Gambetta will give orders for us to be allowed to come out in the first balloon; but it is by no means easy to get places in balloons, and it is unlikely in the extreme that we should be able to bring you out with us. So there you would be shut up in Paris and separated from us for months. No, no, Tim; the matter is altogether impossible. You stay quietly here, and in

ten days or a fortnight, if all goes well, we shall be back again with you."

"And is it in a balloon you're thinking of coming out, Mister Ralph, flying like a bird through the air? Och, wirra, wirra! I'll never see yees again."

"Nonsense, Tim, there's no danger in a balloon. If getting in were no more dangerous than getting out, there would not be much peril in the matter."

"Ah, Mister Ralph, dear, how can you be risking your life and the life of your brother in that way? Shooting at a Prussian, or getting shot at, is all well enough, or going among them with your hair all puffed out, and your face painted brown, and the hair growing all over your face before its time, I say nothing against; but flying through the air in a balloon is just tempting the good Providence. I know what it will be; you'll be just touching against a cloud, and tumbling out, and breaking yourselves into smithereens, and nothing to take home to your dear father and mother, not to mention Miss Milly," and Tim fairly blubbered with grief at the thought.

The boys had great difficulty in pacifying the attached fellow; but at last, with a face expressive of mournful resignation, he agreed to remain with Colonel Tempé until they returned, or until their prolonged absence rendered it likely that they would not return at all, Tim evidently making up his mind that the latter contingency would happen. In that case, as Tim, now his corps had ceased to exist, need no longer serve, he expressed his determination to return to Dijon, and to stay with Captain Barclay until the end of the war, as he should not, he said, have the heart to fight any more when his masters were both

killed. While the conversation had been going on, the boys had continued their toilettes. The preparation which they had obtained gave them an olive complexion, and their transformation was now so complete that the boys would have passed each other unknown, even had they looked steadily at each other. Ralph especially was utterly unlike himself. They now told Tim to go out and get his breakfast, and to return in two hours' time, and then started themselves, rounding their shoulders and so narrowing their chests as much as possible. Ralph stopped at an optician's, bought a pair of slightly-coloured spectacles, and put them on.

It was now twelve o'clock, the preparations having taken them three hours, and they went to the café where they were to meet Colonel Tempé to breakfast. He was already there, and they walked up to the table where he was sitting.

"These seats are engaged," Colonel Tempé said shortly.

The Barclays sat down at the next table, and called in a foreign accent for two glasses of beer. Then they spoke together for some little time about a journey from St. Malo, which they had just made, and Ralph then turned to Colonel Tempé, still speaking French with a strong foreign accent.

"Pardon me, Colonel," he said, "we have just arrived from England. We have a very large quantity of army shoes, and I should feel under a great obligation if you could inform me who is the proper person to whom to apply."

Colonel Tempé at once informed them, adding, "If

your shoes are good ones, and the price fair, and you can deliver them soon, you will not have to wait long, for they are greatly wanted."

"We have also some harness for artillery horses," Ralph added.

"I do not know about that," the colonel said; "but you will obtain all information from the officer I have mentioned."

"Thank you very much," Ralph said, and returned to his seat. Colonel Tempé looked at his watch a little impatiently.

Ralph, after a minute or two, again approached him. "Don't you think we may as well have breakfast, Colonel?" he said in his natural voice.

The colonel looked at him in speechless surprise.

"So the disguises are pretty good?" Ralph said, smiling.

"Impossible!" the colonel exclaimed. "Do my eyes or my ears deceive me. Can it really be ——?"

"It's us, sure enough, Colonel, and now I suppose we may as well sit down."

So saying, the boys took their seats at the table, but Colonel Tempé still looked from one to the other in astonishment. "Wonderful!" he at last said, "wonderful! Even now I know who it is, I do not see the faintest possible resemblance. Percy is of course less altered than you are Ralph, because he is still young looking, but even now I should not recognize him; as for you, with that wonderful head of hair, and that beard, you look fifty, and as unlike yourself as possible. Upon my word, if it were any where else but here in Tours, where

there are all sorts of oddities, I should be ashamed, as a colonel in the army, to sit down to table with you."

"You are a little ashamed as it is," Ralph laughed. "We had not intended to come out in our new character so soon, but when my hair was once done, you see, it was impossible to go about in uniform."

"But what in the world have you done with your hair?" the colonel said, examining him closely, for Ralph had taken off his fur cap and laid it beside him. "You have not got a wig on, and yet all that frizzly bunch cannot be your own."

Ralph explained how it was managed, and added, "and now, Colonel, that you have recovered from your surprise, let us have breakfast."

Breakfast was ordered, to which the boys did full justice, but Colonel Tempé was still getting on but slowly, for he could not take his eyes off Ralph's face. "Will all that frizzle keep in?" he asked presently.

"Yes; the man said that the false hair, which is the greater portion of it, will keep as well for a week, and we have got a small curling iron, so we can beautify ourselves up when we like."

"Well, boys, I have no doubt now that you will be able to get as far as Versailles; as to getting through, that's another matter, but if any one can you will, I am convinced."

"I have not much doubt about it, Colonel," Ralph said, "I seem to see my way quite clearly into Paris. Much more clearly indeed than I do to getting out again."

"Oh, it does not matter about getting out again,

boys, you can stop quietly in there until the end of the siege."

"That is just what we don't want to do," Percy said. "Would you kindly ask them to put into the despatches a request that we may be sent out again by the first balloon that comes. We have no fancy either of us for eating rats and cats, which I suppose is what it will come to before it is over."

"I will see to it, boys," the colonel said smiling; "but really I should advise your staying there; you have done all and more than your share of work."

The boys shook their heads, and it was arranged that if they got in they should come out again in a balloon.

The next morning the boys were up at half-past four, and at half-past five were at the prefecture. Colonel Tempé sent in his name to the minister, and they were at once admitted.

Gambetta was at his writing table. "Good morning, Colonel Tempé," he said cordially, and then added, in some surprise, "Who are these men you have with you, and where are your young Englishmen? I hope they will not be late."

"These are they," the colonel said, smiling.

"They are who?" Gambetta said, puzzled. "I do not understand you, Colonel."

"These are the Lieutenants Barclay," Colonel Tempé said.

The minister looked from the colonel to the two boys and back again. "Do you mean to say—?" he began incredulously.

"Yes, sir, it is us," Ralph said; "and I do not think here is much fear of our being recognized."

"So little, that I do not recognize you now. There is no mistake, Colonel?" he said gravely; "no mystification? You give me your pledge and assurance that these are the officers who have volunteered for this duty? Remember any mistake might be fatal."

"These are certainly the Barclays, sir; I give you my word."

"It is a marvellous disguise," Gambetta said, his doubts now laid at rest, "and does them immense credit. There are the despatches, gentlemen. They are done up in these two quills and sealed. They are of the utmost importance, and must not at any hazard fall into the hands of the enemy. The despatches are in duplicate, so that in case one only gets in the purpose is served. This is a circular letter to all maires and other French authorities, ordering them to give you every possible assistance. This is a special note to the maire of Melun. Here is a letter to General Aurelles at Orleans, if he is not in when you arrive, his chief of his staff will do. He is ordered to send a staff officer with you through the lines, as far as you require him. The horses are in the train. Now good-bye. I wish you a very good future, for you are gallant young fellows."

So saying, he shook them warmly by the hand, and they hurried off to the train.



CHAPTER XV.

THE EXPEDITION.

AN official telegram had been sent forward from Tours to the station-master at Orleans, to request him to order the two horses sent forward in the train to be got out of their boxes without any loss of time, and to do any thing else which the owners of the horses required. Accordingly, as the train was waiting outside the station the guard came round and asked at each carriage for the owners of the horses. He appeared a little surprised when two Jews answered the inquiry, as he had expected that they were officers of high rank and importance.

“The compliments of the station-master,” he said, “and is there any thing he can do with the horses?”

“Yes,” Ralph said; “give my compliments to the station-master, and say that I shall be much obliged if he will get them out of the horse-boxes without loss of time and send them on at once to the head-quarters of General Aurelles. We will go on at once in a vehicle.” Five

minutes afterwards the train drew up at the platform, and the guard ran up. "This way, gentlemen, a carriage is engaged."

Upon arriving at head-quarters they found that, owing to the forethought of Colonel Tempé, they were expected: for, upon sending in their names, they were at once admitted, although several officers of all grades were waiting in the ante-room.

The colonel of the staff gave a movement of surprise. "There is some mistake here," he said to the orderly who had showed them in; "I ordered the Lieutenants Barclay to be admitted."

"These are the gentlemen who gave me the card, Colonel," the orderly answered.

"It is so," Ralph said. "If you will favour us with a moment, alone, we will explain the matter to you."

The colonel led the way into a small cabinet adjoining.

"We are bearers of despatches for General Trochu," Ralph said, "and have disguised ourselves to endeavour to pass through the German lines."

"Oh, is that it?" the colonel said; "I must really apologize; but no one," he said smiling, "could recognize you in that disguise to be French officers. Before we speak further I must ask you for some proof that you are what you state yourselves to be, for at present I have only your cards."

"Here is our letter from M. Gambetta to General Aurelles," Ralph said; "it is directed to be opened by you, should he be absent."

"That is all right," the colonel said, when he had read

it. "My surprise at your appearance was natural, for the telegram we received this morning only said, 'The two Lieutenants Barclay will arrive by six o'clock train. Their business is most important. Have a well-mounted officer of staff ready to accompany them through lines.' I thought, of course, that you had orders to report on position of troops, and felt, I admit, rather angry that Gambetta should wish to send subaltern officers to inspect matters concerning which he has full reports. You wish, of course, to go in at once?"

"Our horses will be here in five minutes," Ralph said, "and we wish to get as far as possible to-night. We mean to cross the Loign at Montargis, and get as far as we can to-night, so as to arrive either at Meaux or Melun to-morrow evening. We should, of course, prefer Melun, as being much the shortest route towards Versailles. We shall of necessity be guided by the position of the Germans."

"You have not breakfasted, of course?" the colonel said; "I was just going to sit down when you came in, for I go out to the front at ten, and it is half-past nine now. You will have no chance of getting any thing before you arrive at Montargis. I can introduce you to the officer who will accompany you."

The boys readily accepted the invitation, and at once followed the colonel into another room, where breakfast was laid, and several officers of the staff were waiting for the arrival of the colonel to begin. There was a general look of surprise when he entered with two strange-looking Jews, which was not a little increased when he said, "Gentlemen, the Lieutenants Barclay. You look sur-

prised ; but your astonishment will cease when I tell you that they are upon an important mission, and do not look like themselves ; and now to table, for they have to start in ten minutes. Captain Duprat, let me make you specially acquainted with these gentlemen. They are bound for Montargis, and you will see them through our out-posts."

In another quarter of an hour the boys were issuing from the streets of Orleans, and were soon going along at a hand-gallop, by the road along the banks of the Loire, while to their north stretched the flat and densely-wooded country known as the Forest of Orleans. As far as Chateauneuf they kept near the river. Here they halted half an hour to give breathing-time to their horses ; then started again, and rode fast to Bellegarde. Here was the last post of regular troops, but Cathlineau's franc-tireurs were scattered throughout the country as far as Montargis, and it would have been more difficult for the Barclays to have passed through them than through the regular troops, as they had less respect for passes.

After another halt they again started, and Captain Duprat accompanied them as far as Montargis, where there was a small body of franc-tireurs. Captain Duprat's orders were to sleep at Montargis, and then return to Chateauneuf the next day. The boys felt rather stiff and tired as they rode into Montargis, for they had not been on horseback since the day when they were taken prisoners in the Vosges, and they had ridden forty miles since breakfast. They would, however, have willingly pushed on another twenty miles, but their horses had even a longer day's work before them on the morrow.

Being accompanied by a staff-officer, no questions whatever were asked them; and after a good dinner at the hotel they went to the maire, to inquire whether he could tell them as to the advanced posts of the Germans. This functionary, like such functionaries in general, could give them but slight information; but, as far as he knew, there were no German troops on the right bank of the Loing south of its junction with the Yonne. Beyond the Yonne they were scattered pretty thickly every where.

At daybreak the next morning they started; Captain Duprat turned his horse's head westward again, while the Barclays rode north. Their pace was rapid, as they never drew rein except at villages to ask whether the Prussians had been heard of. They heard of parties at Lorrez and Cheroy, but as they kept through bye-lanes, and as the country was thickly wooded, the risk was at present small. They had with them an excellent map, which enabled them to follow the smallest footpaths. At eleven o'clock they stopped at the little hamlet of Montarlet. There they breakfasted and gave the horses an hour's rest while they consulted with the maire. He was a miller, and turned out a shrewd fellow, entering into the matter with great warmth. He advised them to ford the Yonne between Montereau and its junction with the Loing, to keep to the woods for ten miles, and then to turn to the left, and to cross the Seine at one of the numerous fords there, into the Forest of Fontainebleau, and they would then find themselves between that town and Melun, and could ride boldly into Melun as if they had come from Fontainebleau.

"I know every foot of the country," he said, "and will

guide you till you are safely across the Seine. If we should by any chance fall upon a patrol of the enemy, it will be simple enough to say that I am a miller of Montarlot, and that you have showed me your permission to travel about through the German line, and have asked me to guide you by the shortest way to Melun."

They had every reason to be thankful to their guide, for they found that there were a great many scattered parties of Uhlans about. By dint of making *détours* through woods, however, they succeeded in striking the Seine at Fontaine le Port without once meeting them.

This village was, however, occupied by some half dozen cavalry, and it was impossible to pass the river unseen by them. The Barclays thanked very warmly their friend the Maire, and promised to mention his conduct upon their return to Tours, and then saying good-bye to him rode into the village alone.

The sergeant of Uhlans came to the door of the principal cabaret and looked out.

"Good day," Ralph said in German, reining up his horse. "Is it here that I cross the river for Fontainebleau? They told me at le Châtelet that it was shorter than going round by the main road."

"Yes, you are right here," the sergeant said. "Have you passes?"

"Oh, yes," Ralph said, laughing. "It would have been no easy matter to get from Frankfort here without them." So saying he pulled out the Prussian permit.

"That is right," the sergeant said. "Your horses look very done."

"We have ridden from Coulommiers through Rozoy and Normant."

"It would have been an easier road to have gone from Normant through Melun," the sergeant said. And he took out a map and examined it. "No, I see le Châtelet is a more direct line."

"We have time to wait an hour," Ralph said, turning to Percy; "and it will be better for our beasts. See that they are rubbed down and fed."

The sergeant gave a peremptory shout, and the master of the wineshop ran out. The sergeant pointed to the horses.

"Do you speak French?" he asked Ralph.

"No," Ralph said, "but my son does. Aaron, tell him to rub them down and feed them well, and see to it yourself; these dogs are capable of cheating even a horse."

Ralph then entered the cabaret and called for some bread and cheese and a bottle of the best wine, with three glasses. The Prussian sergeant sat down with them and talked of Germany for an hour.

Then they started again, crossed the river, and an hour and a half later entered Melun. Here as they came in by the road from Fontainebleau, which was held in force by the Germans, no question was asked. They rode their tired horses through the streets until they saw a quiet hotel. Riding into the yard they told the ostler to put up their horses and to clean and feed them well, enforcing their request with a five-franc piece. They then entered the hotel and found that they could have beds, as the number of German officers quartered upon this house was

smaller than usual, owing to the greater portion of the troops having been pushed on to reinforce Von der Tann.

It was now half-past five, and was already dusk. They therefore went at once to the Maire, to whom they presented Gambetta's letter, and requested his assistance in purchasing a van with a pair of good strong horses at once.

"It will be next to impossible to get horses," the Maire said, "but I will do my best. I have two carriage horses of good breed, but I fear if I were to let you have them the Prussians might remark it."

"We have two first-rate animals," Ralph said, "from Gambetta's own stables. They have carried us a hundred miles since breakfast time yesterday. They are likely to be at least as good as yours are, only they want a few days' rest; will you exchange?"

"Certainly," the Maire said at once. "If any inquiries were to be made about it I need make no secret of that transaction. As for the covered cart, I will send round at once to those of my neighbours who have one, and as you are ready to pay for it, and as the Prussians are requisitioning them without payment, you can rely upon having one to-morrow morning ready for your start. I will send a note round to you to-night to tell you where it is at present."

"We had better go now to the German commandant's office and get our passes countersigned. When that is done we shall be all right for Versailles."

"Yes, I should advise you to do that," the Maire said. "You will not have much difficulty; they are civil enough

about passes and matters of that kind. Will you mention you have seen me?"

"Not unless any question is asked about horses, in which case we should of course mention that hearing you had a pair of horses and ours requiring rest, we had changed with you."

They now went boldly to the orderly-room. An officer was on duty.

"Will you please to visé this for Versailles?" Ralph said in German.

The officer took it, glanced at it and at them.

"The last visé I see was at Meaux a fortnight since."

"We have been travelling on horseback since," Ralph said, "and have had no occasion to have it viséd, as it has always passed us without trouble. As we are now going to Versailles with a waggon, we thought it better to have the pass viséd here."

"Where have you come from now?"

"From Fontainebleau," Ralph said. "We have been down to Pithiviers, and I sent off four waggon loads of things from there for the frontier."

"Your best way is through Corbeil and Longjumeau," the officer said, handing back the paper.

"Thank you, sir," Ralph replied, "that is the way we are intending to go."

In the evening the Maire himself came in to look at the horses, and told them that he had obtained a good light-covered waggon, with springs, which had been used for the removal of furniture. The price was a thousand francs. "If you like," he said, "to come round with me now, my servant shall take the horses round there, put

them in, and bring the waggon here, and he can then take your horses back with him to my stables. Please to write me a paper, signed by the name on your German pass, saying that you have bought my horses of me, and have sold me yours ; put down any figures you like as having passed between us. You are upon a very perilous expedition ; and in case of any thing happening to you, it would be well for me that nothing beyond a mere business transaction could be traced between us."

At seven o'clock the next morning they started. The distance was only thirty miles, but the roads were terribly slippery from the deep snow, now trampled flat by the immense traffic of the army. It was five in the afternoon when they reached the first sentries at the entrance to Versailles. The pass was sufficient, and they went on uninterrupted. Percy drove and Ralph sat beside him.

The town swarmed with officers and soldiers of all ranks. No one paid them any attention, and they drove through the Place d'Armes and on to the market-place, where they knew there were many inns frequented by the market people. Here, as they expected, they found it impossible to get a bed, but they had no difficulty in obtaining permission for the waggon to stand in a yard, and were lucky enough to get stable room for the horses. They went into the town and bought four blankets, and as at starting they had filled the waggon two feet deep with straw, they had, in spite of the cold weather, every hope of passing a comfortable night. Dinner was the next thing, and that over, they strolled about until nine o'clock. It was a singular sight, this army of invaders

comfortably quartered in the ancient capital of France. The palace, the statues in front of it, every thing told of the glories of France ; every park around, every little palace was intimately associated with its sovereigns ; and here, in the midst of these memorials, the German invaders stalked carelessly, drank in the cafés, or feasted in the hotels, as if the place had belonged to them from time immemorial. Afar off in the quiet of the evening could be heard the distant boom of the guns round the beleaguered city.

There were several things which the Barclays wanted to get, but they had no difficulty with them, as the shops were all open as usual. The population had a depressed look ; all classes were suffering much, with the exception of the shopkeepers, whose business was as brisk as ever, save only those tradesmen who dealt in articles of female attire, for which there was no demand whatever. The ladies of Versailles went as little as possible into the streets, and when they did so all dressed themselves in black or other sombre colours. By nine o'clock the shops were all closed, and the Barclays returned to their waggon with their purchases in their hands.

"It's awfully cold, Ralph !" Percy said, as they rolled themselves in their blankets, and covered themselves over with straw.

"It is, Percy ; but it will be a deal colder in the river."

Percy gave a shudder at the thought. "Don't you think, Ralph, that there is any possibility of entering on either of the other sides ?"

"Not the slightest, Percy ; it must be across the river,

or not at all. The sentries will not be any thing like so thick upon that side."

Had any one looked into the waggon at eight o'clock next morning he would have been surprised at the occupation upon which the boys were engaged. Each was sewing a piece of thin waterproof cloth upon a pair of white woollen gloves, so that the fingers when outspread had the appearance of the webbed foot of a frog.

"That ought to help us," Ralph said, when they finished. "For a really long swim I daresay they would be very fatiguing; but it is cold, not fatigue, we have to fear, and speed is therefore every thing."

At nine o'clock Ralph went to the office of the general in command. There were a number of other persons waiting for permits, and Ralph waited his turn to go in to the officer engaged in signing them.

"I am from Frankfort, as my papers show," he said, handing the officer his pass. "I wish for a pass to go with my horse and cart to Bellevue; there are, I hear, many officers desirous of selling or sending home articles they have saved." Saved, it may be mentioned, was the word employed in the German army for "stolen," which has an ugly sound.

The officer signed the paper. "You must not go by the Sèvres route," he said; "you must turn off at Viroflay, and go by Chaville."

Half an hour later they started in the waggon. At the gates of Versailles, a mile from the town, they were stopped by sentries, but allowed to pass on production of the order with the necessary stamp.

"Every thing is going on well, thus far," Ralph said,

as they turned off from the main road at Viroflay. "It looks like snow, too, which would exactly suit us."

Viroflay was crowded with Prussian troops. An officer stopped them as they passed. "Where are you going to?"

"We are going to Bellevue," Ralph said; "we are purchasers of any curiosities or souvenirs of the war, such as pictures or clocks, and we also undertake to deliver in Germany any article which may be entrusted to our charge. We have our passes and papers in regular order."

"Wait a minute," the officer said; "draw up at that villa there."

The waggon drew up to the villa, the officer walking in front. He motioned to Ralph to dismount, and to follow him into the house, leaving Percy in charge of the waggon. Five or six officers were sitting in what had been the drawing-room of the villa.

"Who have you got here?" one of them asked, as Ralph's conductor entered.

"A worthy Hebrew," the other laughed, "who will either purchase or carry home articles saved."

There was a general movement of interest. The furniture of the room was a wreck, the papers were hanging in strips, a broken chair was blazing upon the fire, several family portraits on the wall were pierced with holes, having evidently served the purpose of targets for pistol shooting. Ralph's conductor left the room for a moment, and returned with a very handsome drawing-room clock, worth, Ralph knew, at least fifteen hundred francs. .

“How much will you give for that?”

Ralph examined it critically.

“Four hundred francs,” he said.

“Nonsense! It cost five times that.”

“About four times,” Ralph said, “when it was new. It is not new now, and it has to be taken to Germany. If you prefer it I will carry it to Frankfort, and send it on thence by rail, at ten per cent. upon its value.”

“Yes, I will agree to that,” the officer said. “How much will that be?”

“I am content to take it at your own valuation,” Ralph said. “The value you set upon the clock was two thousand francs.”

There was a laugh among the other officers.

“He has you there, major.”

“Not at all,” the officer said. “He shall take it at the valuation he placed upon it, four hundred francs.”

“Pardon me,” Ralph said, “I did not value it at that sum, I only offered to give that sum for it; besides which that was an estimate of the value I set upon it at Viroflay, not the value I should set upon it at Frankfort. I will say one thousand francs; that is, I will undertake it at a hundred, if you will get it put into a case of some sort.”

The other officers now offered various objects either for sale or transport—pictures, vases, clocks, and even pianos. Ralph haggled over the price of each article, in a way which would have done honour to his appearance. At last, having arranged all their matters, he said that he was going on to Bellevue, but would call and complete the purchases, and receive the goods entrusted to him either that night or the next morning.

“If any of you gentlemen would kindly give me your card to give to the officer of the regiment at Bellevue, saying that you have found me fair in my dealing, I should feel very grateful,” Ralph said humbly. The officer laughed, but one of them took out his card and wrote upon it, “Dear Von Koch, this man is, for a Hebrew, tolerably fair in his ideas——”

“That is for the major of the regiment at Bellevue,” he said, and Ralph bowed as if he had received a recommendation of the warmest kind.

“I was beginning to be alarmed, Ralph,” Percy said, when his brother again took his place in the waggon.

“I have been haggling over prices,” Ralph said; “fortunately we are not pressed for time.”

They had another stop of some duration at Chaville, and it was nearly three o'clock in the afternoon before they came down to the back of Bellevue. Here they were stopped, and upon Ralph producing his pass an officer came up.

“You cannot go any further,” he said, “you are close to Bellevue now, but if you were to take this waggon into the main road, you would draw Valerien's fire upon us at once. You will find most of the officers there,” pointing to a large house near.

“I have this card for Major Von Koch,” Ralph said; “I am here to buy or carry home on commission, goods of all kinds.”

The officer went with Ralph, and the scene at Viroflay was repeated, but upon a much larger scale. Viroflay is a small village containing only a few large villas; Bellevue is composed almost entirely of handsome

residences owned by Parisians ; the quantity of articles "saved" was proportionately large. After examining and bargaining for a large number of valuable articles of furniture, pictures and clocks, Ralph left with some of the officers to view other articles in the villas upon the side of Bellevue looking down upon the river. Percy had taken the horses out of the waggon, and accompanied his brother, ostensibly to carry back any articles purchased. At one of the villas, Ralph expressed a great desire to go out into the garden to look over Paris, and the officer with him, being in an excellent humour at the disposal of some articles at much higher prices than he had expected to receive, and at having the proceeds in German bank-notes in his pockets, went out himself, and pointed out all the various objects of interest.

The fog of a winter's evening was already shutting in the view, but the boys could see the principal buildings of Paris. The towers of Notre-Dame, the domes of the Pantheon and Invalides, the heights of Montmartre and Vilette, and the forts of Issy and Vanves were distinctly visible. The boys' eyes turned, however, more to the river at their feet and the intervening ground than upon the objects, however interesting, of distant Paris.

"Do not show yourself," the officer said. "If we were caught sight of from Issy or Point du Jour, or from that gun-boat below, we should have a rain of shells about us in no time. You can look out from among the trees, but do not get beyond their shelter, or you will be seen instantly."

The house in whose garden they were standing stood

upon the brow of the hill ; behind was a little wood, and gardens sloping pretty steeply down ; then, along by the water, was a street, with houses upon either side. The river was here divided by an island, the lower end of which, however, scarcely extended low enough to be opposite to the spot upon which the boys were standing.

“ Bless me,” Ralph said, “ it must be very dangerous living down there. Why, that gun-boat could blow the place into the air.”

“ That she could,” the officer said, “ and consequently none of our men live there. We have sentries along the river bank, and a few others scattered about, but none of the troops are quartered there, nor even in this line of villas where we now are. If we were to show a light at night in any window here we should have a shell in in a couple of minutes. We have no fear whatever of a sortie in this direction, and have plenty of force behind.”

Ralph and Percy lingered upon one excuse or another asking questions as long as they could, and making the best use of their time to gain a fair idea of the ground that they would have to cross. They had with them in the waggon a map of Bellevue and Meudon upon a large scale, with every house marked upon it.

“ It is going to be a dark night,” the officer said, as they hurried away, “ and we shall have snow before midnight.”

Another hour or two was spent in purchasing various articles taken from the French villas. Darkness had come on, and Ralph told the officers that he should not return until the next morning to Versailles, and that if the articles to be entrusted to his care for delivery were put in rough

cases, of which there were plenty which had come full of stores, and brought by ten o'clock in the morning carefully directed, it would be in sufficient time.

"Will you give us leave to sleep in one of the villas upon the farther side of the road?" Ralph asked the officer in command. "My boy has never seen a shot fired in earnest, and I should like him to be able to say he had watched the fire of the forts round Paris."

"If you sleep there," the colonel said, "you must not light a fire or show a light, or you would bring the fire of a hundred guns upon us."

"I will be very careful, sir," Ralph answered. "Will you kindly let an orderly go with us to pass us through the sentries? for as it's dark now they would not let us pass."

The colonel gave the order, and an orderly went with them. They stopped at the waggon, and each took out a large bundle. "We shall want our blankets to-night," Ralph said; "it is bitterly cold. Would you like a glass of brandy to help keep it out, my man?"

The soldier smiled an assent, drank off a glass of brandy, and then accompanied them to the villa. Short as was the distance, they were challenged twice, and the sign and countersign had to be exchanged. They reached the deserted villa, threw down the bundles in a corner, and then the orderly said good night, and left them to themselves.



CHAPTER XVI.

A DESPERATE ATTEMPT.

“**S**O far, so good, Percy!” Ralph said, when they heard the street-door slam as the orderly left. “Hitherto, we have had the most extraordinary good fortune, and as it’s going to snow,—for I felt a few flakes as we came along,—I look upon it as good as done.”

“It will take away from us risk of being hit, but I don’t see that it will make much difference in our risk of being drowned,” Percy said. “I own, Ralph, I am a great deal more afraid of that than of the other.”

“But it does, Percy; it makes all the difference in the world. We had agreed that we would put on life-belts, but that we would blow the smallest quantity of air possible into them; so that they might give us some slight assistance, and yet not be too buoyant, to prevent us from diving. Now we can blow them up with wind, so as to prevent the possibility of our being drowned. Once in the water, and we are safe from every thing except a stray

bullet. In a snow-storm, on such a dark night as this, they could not see our heads five yards off."

"But what is worse, Ralph, we shall not be able to see five yards either, and should have no idea where we were swimming."

"I had not thought of that, Percy. Yes, that would be very serious;" and Ralph thought for some time. "It seems a risk, this, Percy; but I can see no plan, except to draw their fire."

"How do you mean?" Percy asked, puzzled.

"You see, Percy, our idea before was to get down to the shore, to put our dummy into the water, and to let it float down a hundred yards, the length of its string, and then to start ourselves, holding the other end of the string, in hopes that if the sentries are really sharply on the look-out, they would see the dummy instead of us, as it will be a much more conspicuous object, especially as we intended to do as much diving as we could; and our movements forward would jerk the dummy's string, and make him bob, like a man swimming. If they once caught sight of it they would be too busy firing at it to look about for any one else. Well now, I think that instead of giving up the dummy altogether, as we might have done now that the snow has come on, we must let it float gently down for seventy or eighty yards, and then throw a stone into the water by it, so as to draw the attention of the sentry; or, if the sentries are pretty far apart, one of us might make a great splash in the water when the dummy is floating, and then run back before the sentry got up, and get into the water quietly higher up. Their fire will act as a guide to us."

"We had better start soon, Ralph ; it may take us an hour, or even two, to get down to the water, for we must go along like ghosts, so as not to alarm the sentries, and we shall have walls to get over, and all sorts of difficulties."

"All right, Percy ; I do not see the use of waiting. We shall not get any warmer by stopping here. It's like having a tooth out : one's got to do it, and the sooner it's done the better. Now for our bundles."

They went downstairs into a cellar, where the light could not be seen from outside, struck a light, and lit a candle. The first thing taken out of the bundle was the "dummy ;" a net, rather larger than a man's head, tightly filled with corks ; with a cord, a hundred yards in length, attached. Next were two complete suits, made of white calico, with caps, with long flaps of the same material. Next were two large rolls of india-rubber webbing, about six inches wide, which they had brought from Tours with them.

"I can't think that that will be any good, Ralph."

"It will, indeed, Percy ; the water will of course soak through, but what gets in will remain in, and the heat of the body will warm it a good deal. I can assure you it will be a great deal warmer than having the icy water flowing past you."

Both boys now took off their coats and waistcoats, put on a warm flannel jersey over their flannel shirts, and then wound the bandages of india-rubber round each other's bodies. They began under the arms, drawing the webbing tight as they wound it round, so that its natural elasticity caused each turn to press tightly upon the turn above, which it overlapped. This bandage was

continued down to the lower part of the body. Then they put on the life-belts. Over them they put their suits of white calico; white shoes, with india-rubber soles; the white caps, and swimming gloves. They then put the "dummy" in a pillow-case, which they had bought for it at Versailles. Before putting on their caps they fastened the quills with the despatches in their hair. In a belt underneath their jackets each carried a heavy revolver.

"This india-rubber stuff regularly squeezes me, Ralph."

"All the better, Percy;" you will feel the benefit of it when you are in the water, believe me."

The boys now knelt down together, and asked for protection through the peril which they were about to encounter; a few minutes later they rose, grasped each other's hand, and then, blowing out the light, groped their way up-stairs, opened a window, which led into the garden, and stepped out. The wind was blowing strongly, snow-flakes were being whisked hither and thither like spray from a wave. Had it not been for the gleam from the snow-covered ground it would have been impossible to see ten paces here; as it was, it was intensely dark.

"It's lucky that it's down-hill, Percy, or we should never find our way to the water's-edge; if we keep descending we must be there at last."

Before starting, the boys went a few paces from each other, and were pleased to find that their white costumes suited admirably, as between the driving snow, and the white sheet upon the ground, they could not make each other out at more than eight or ten yards, even when they knew exactly where they stood. They now began

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to descend the hill, very carefully, step by step. The snow upon the ground made walking much more easy than it otherwise would have been. Their footsteps, muffled alike by the india-rubber soles, and the snow upon which they walked, were inaudible even to themselves. They had several walls to climb, and the noiseless india-rubber soles were of good service here. Several times they could hear the sentries beating their feet upon the ground to warm them, but in no case were they near enough to see them. At last, after an hour and a half, spent in passing the three hundred yards which separated them from the river, they reached in safety the wall of the road which runs along by the river.

Here the sentries were pacing along at distances of thirty or forty yards apart. The white houses upon the opposite side of the road could be faintly seen, and the boys moved along until opposite an opening between them, by which they could get through to the river. Looking over the wall they could watch the sentries, and choosing their time when one had just past, so that his back would be turned towards them, he no sooner disappeared in the darkness than they dropped noiselessly into the road, ran across the street, climbed a low railing, and stood in a garden which reached down to the river.

They stood watching for some time to assure themselves that no sentry was placed in the garden, but at last they stole forwards, and stood at the end of the garden with the river at their feet. The snow, which was at their backs, was falling faster than ever. The river deepened rapidly from the wall, but the water was low enough for any one to get along on the sloping side,

faced with rough stone, between the foot of the wall and the water.

The boys got over the wall, took the dummy from the bag, and holding one end of the cord, put it quietly into the water, and allowed it to float down about sixty yards.

"Now, Percy," Ralph said, "you get ready to slip into the water as quietly as possible the moment you hear a splash. I will leave this bag here, so as to know exactly where you have gone in, and as the rope is plenty long enough, you keep hold of it here, at sixty yards from the dummy, and I will fasten the slack end to the stone, so that when I go in, I have only to hold the rope in my hand to be able to join you. I will take this heavy coping stone in my hand, will crawl along on this shelving bank till I arrive at the dummy, and will then throw the stone in, and run back at full speed, and be in the water a few seconds after you are."

"All right, Ralph, I understand. Keep your pistol cocked in your hand as you go."

Ralph crept quietly along under the wall, until he saw the dummy floating at the edge of the water a few feet below him. He rose on his feet to throw in the stone, when he heard a deep exclamation behind him, and looking round, he saw a dark figure within two feet of him. Another moment, and the sentry would have brought his rifle to his shoulder, for he sprang back, giving a loud shout, but Ralph wheeled round instantaneously, threw up his revolver, and fired at the sentinel's body. He saw him fall, turned round, hurled the heavy stone with a loud splash into the water, and then crawling low under the wall, ran at full speed back again. As he did so, two

sentries in the garden over his head, fired in the direction of the splash in the water, and shouts were heard all along the bank.

In another instant Ralph grasped the line, and slid down the snowy slopes into the water, entering so quietly that no sound whatever betrayed his entry. It was icy cold, and almost took away his breath. Twenty strokes and he joined Percy.

"All right, old man, they can't see us now."

"You are not hit, are you Ralph?" Percy gasped.

"No, it was my revolver; I had to shoot a sentry to save my life. It's lucky we have got these life belts on, for I am sure we should never get across."

"There! there!" was shouted in German, "I see his head bobbing up and down," and eight or ten rifle shots were fired from the garden where the sentry had fallen, in the direction of the dummy.

The boys swam on desperately, then Ralph said, "You can slip the string now, Percy, the dummy has done its work; it must be quite out of sight from the bank. Do not you feel the benefit of the india rubber?"

"Yes," Percy said, "I am warm enough in the body, but my legs are in agony from the cold, these gloves are helping us on though at a great rate."

"Well, there is one blessing," Ralph said, "we can't miss the way now."

As he spoke, a heavy fire of musketry opened from the French upon the other side. Alarmed at the sudden fire on the part of the Germans they fired at the flashes of their guns, and fresh reinforcements coming up on either side, a heavy exchange of musketry shots took place



A Swim for Life.—Page 277.

across the river, partially over the boys' heads, but principally a hundred yards lower down the stream, in the direction where the dummy was seen by the Germans. The boys swam with long, steady, noiseless strokes.

"We must be half way across," Ralph said.

"I am getting deadly cold all over, Ralph; I can't sink, of course, but I shall freeze to death before I reach the opposite bank."

"No, no, Percy," Ralph said as cheerily as he could, though he felt himself that the intense cold was rapidly overcoming his strength. "Keep up your heart, strike as hard as you can, the more you exert yourself the better."

In another minute or two Ralph found he was leaving Percy behind, and slackened his speed.

"Good-bye, Ralph, my legs are all cramped up, and my arms are numbed; I can't swim another stroke; it is all up with me," he said faintly. "God bless you; don't stop with me, you can do no good, and your only chance is to go on"

Ralph, however, put one hand upon Percy's life belt and struck out for shore, but he felt that it was hopeless. Frightful pains were shooting through his limbs, and he breathed what he believed to be a last prayer, when a boom like thunder, a few yards off, galvanized him into life again, for he saw the gun-boat which they had seen in the morning, only a few yards distant. She had just fired a gun loaded with grape in the direction of the Germans who were firing. She was still at anchor, and the stream was drifting them down fast upon her.

"Help!" Ralph shouted. "Help! we are drowning, and have despatches. Throw a rope, quick!"

"Where are you?" answered a voice.

"Here, close to you, just abreast," Ralph shouted.

In another instant a rope struck his face. He grasped it, twisted it tightly round Percy's body and his own, tied a rough knot with his last strength, and then lost consciousness. When he recovered his senses his first sensation was that of intense pain, so intense that it extracted a groan from him.

"That's right, rub away, and pour some more brandy down his throat," a voice said. Then he became conscious that he was being rubbed with hot flannels. He opened his eyes and saw a gleaming of moving machinery and the red glare of furnaces.

"Where am I?" he asked at last.

"In the engine-room of the gun-boat Farcey," a voice said.

"I am suffering agony," Ralph murmured between his teeth.

"I dare say," the officer who was standing by him answered. "You were pretty near frozen to death. Luckily your life belts kept you from taking in any water; but it was a near squeak; another three minutes in the water and the doctor says it would have been all up with you."

"Where is my brother?" Ralph asked suddenly, sitting up with a full consciousness of all that had passed.

"He is coming round," the officer said. "He was farther gone than you were, and his heart's action was altogether suspended from the cold; his limbs are twitching now, and the doctor says he will do. You call him your brother, but I suppose you mean your son?"

"Please lend me some clothes," Ralph said. "I can stand now."

Some clothes had already been got in readiness and warmed, and in a couple of minutes Ralph was kneeling by his brother's side. Percy was now coming to, and was suffering agonies similar to those which Ralph himself had experienced from the recommencement of circulation in his limbs. He looked round utterly bewildered, for he had become insensible before the Farcey's gun had given notice of her proximity. He smiled, however, when his eyes fell on Ralph's face.

"It is all right, Percy, thank God," Ralph said. We are on board the gun-boat Farcey, and in ten minutes we shall be landed in the heart of Paris."

In another five minutes Percy was sufficiently recovered to begin to dress. The commander of the Farcey now turned to Ralph.

"Your son has had a very narrow shave of it, sir."

"Son!" Ralph said; "he is my brother."

The officer looked surprised.

"How old do you take me to be?" Ralph asked.

"Forty-five or fifty," the officer said.

"I shall not be seventeen for some months," Ralph answered.

The officer looked at him with an air of intense astonishment, and there was a burst of laughter from the men standing round. The commandant frowned angrily at them.

"Quite so, my dear sir," he said soothingly. "I was only joking with you; it is evident that you are not yet seventeen."

“You think I have lost my senses with the shock,” Ralph said, smiling. “I can assure you that that is my age. My beard and whiskers are so firmly fixed on with cobbler’s wax that I shall have an awful trouble to get them off, and my hair the same. If you feel along here from one ear to the other you will feel a ridge, that is the cobbler’s wax that sticks all this mass of frizzled hair on. Did you not notice that both my brother’s and my face and hands were much darker than the rest of our skin?”

“Yes, the doctor did notice that,” the Captain said, now beginning to think that Ralph was not insane after all. Passing his finger where Ralph directed him, he felt the ridge of the false hair.

“Who are you then, may I ask?” he said.

“My brother and myself are named Barclay,” Ralph said. “We are lieutenants in the army, and are both decorated for service in the field. We left Tours four days ago, and are bearers of despatches from Gambetta to General Trochu.

A cheer broke from all who were standing within hearing, and the boys’ hands, for Percy came up at the moment, were warmly shaken by the officers of the boat one after another. Congratulations of all sorts were heaped upon them, and those around were unable to make enough of them.

“No pigeon has come in for ten days,” the commander said. “You will indeed be welcome.”

At this moment a sailor came down to say that they were passing the Louvre, and in another two minutes the gunboat lay alongside the wharf.

"You do not know, I suppose, where Trochu is to be found?" the commander of the Farcey asked.

"No, indeed," Ralph said.

"I will go with you myself," the officer said. "If the general has gone to bed, we must knock him up. He won't mind when he hears the reason."

It was but a short distance to walk, but the boys had great difficulty in getting there, for their limbs were stiff and aching, and they felt a burning sensation all over them as if they had been dipped in boiling water. General Trochu had not yet gone to bed, and upon the message being delivered by the orderly, "The Commander of the Farcey, with officers bearing despatches from Tours," he ordered them to be instantly admitted.

"These are Lieutenants Barclay, General," the Commander of the Farcey said. "A heavy firing broke out suddenly from the water side at Lower Meudon. It was answered from our side, and thinking that it might be some one trying to swim across, I fired a round of grape into the Germans, and ordered a sharp look-out to be kept. I had scarcely spoken the words before we were hailed for a rope, and in another minute these officers, both insensible from cold, were pulled on board. Thinking they might have despatches, I at once started up the river, and when they were brought round by the surgeon, they stated that they were the Lieutenants Barclay, bearers of despatches from Tours."

"Gallantly done! gentlemen; bravely done!" the General said warmly, shaking both boys by the hand. The burning heat of Percy's hand struck him at once.

“Where are your despatches, gentlemen? you have preserved them, I hope?”

Ralph produced the two quills. “They are duplicate, General,” he said. “We each carried one in case any accident might befall one of us.”

“Thank you,” the General said. “I need now detain you no longer. I have work here for all night, and you had better go instantly to bed. Your brother is in a high state of fever.” He touched a bell, and an officer in waiting came in. “Captain Bar, will you kindly take these gentlemen to an hotel at once. The horses are, as usual, in the carriage, I suppose; and,” he dropped his voice, “send a message from me to request Dr. Marcey to see them at once, the younger one is in a state of high fever.”

In another quarter of an hour the boys were in comfortable beds in rooms adjoining each other. Ralph, who was heavy and stupid with the effects of the cold, was asleep almost the instant his head touched the pillow. He was roused a short time afterwards by being shaken, and opening his eyes he saw some one leaning over him. “Drink this,” the gentleman said, holding a glass to his lips. Ralph mechanically did as he was told, and fell off again into a heavy sleep, from which he did not awake until late the next afternoon. His first impulse was to look at his watch. It had stopped at eleven o'clock the night before, the hour at which he had entered the Seine. Then he rang the bell.

“What o'clock is it?” he asked, when the servant entered.

“Just struck five, sir.”

"What, five in the afternoon!" Ralph exclaimed.

"Yes, sir."

"I have slept," Ralph said with a laugh. "However, I feel all right again now. Is my brother up?"

"No, sir," the man said.

"Percy!" Ralph shouted; "it is five o'clock in the afternoon. Get up."

"The other gentleman is not in the next room, sir," the servant said.

"Is he not?" Ralph said puzzled. "I was desperately sleepy last night, certainly; but not too sleepy, I should have thought, to have made a mistake about that. I feel sure he was in the next room."

"He was, sir," the servant said; "but Dr. Marcey, when he came to see you just after you got into bed, ordered him to be carried at once into another room, in order that he might not disturb you. He said it was essential that you should have your sleep out undisturbed."

"But why should my brother disturb me?" Ralph asked anxiously; "is he not well?"

"No, sir, he has got fever. He has been calling out a great deal. He has got two sisters with him, and the doctor has been every hour."

By this time Ralph was out of bed.

"Here are some clothes, sir," the man said, handing them to him. "The landlord thought you would want some at once when you woke, and ordered three or four suits for you to try." Ralph seized the first that came to hand, and threw them on.

"All Paris was talking about your getting through the

enemy last night, sir; there have been hundreds of people here to call."

Ralph did not even hear what was said. "Now," he said, "take me to him at once."

The servant led Ralph along a passage, and stopped at a door, at which he knocked. A sister of mercy opened the door. "This is the other gentleman." The sister opened the door for Ralph to enter.

"He is quiet now," she said in a soft compassionate tone. Ralph went into the room. Percy lay in the bed with his head surrounded with ice. His face was flushed, and his eyes wild. He was moving uneasily about, talking to himself.

"It is that schoolmaster who is at the bottom of it," he muttered. "He was a traitor, and I thought we hung him, but I suppose we didn't. Perhaps he got down after we had gone off. If not, how could he have betrayed us again. I have heard of liquid fire, but that was liquid ice. It got into my veins somehow instead of blood. I tell you, Ralph, it's no good. I can't stand it any longer, but I will pay off that schoolmaster first. Let me get at him," and he made an effort to rise.

The sister tried to restrain him, but so violent were his efforts to rise that Ralph, who was looking on with tears streaming down his cheeks, was obliged to assist to hold him down. When he became quiet the sister forced some medicine between his lips, Ralph holding up his head.

"Shall I speak to him?" Ralph asked. "He may know my voice."

“Better not, sir,” the nurse said; “it would probably only set him off again.”

“What does the doctor say about him?” Ralph asked.

“He says it is brain fever,” the nurse said. “He only said it might be some days before the crisis came, and that he could not give any decided opinion at present; but he seemed to have hope.”

“Thank God at least for that!” Ralph said, earnestly. Percy, turning his head round again, caught sight of Ralph. “Ah, there is that schoolmaster again! If no one else will hang him, I will do it myself. Let me get at him!” And he again made desperate efforts to get out of bed.

“You had better go, sir,” one of the sisters said, urgently. “The sight of you makes him worse, and you can do him no good.”

Seeing that it was so, Ralph reluctantly left the room, his only comfort being that Percy was as carefully tended and looked after as it was possible for him to be. He had scarcely returned to his room when an officer was shown in. “I daresay you hardly remember me,” he said. “I came here with you last night.”

“I am very glad to see you again, and to thank you for the trouble you took,” Ralph said. “I was too sleepy to do so last night.”

“Not at all,” the officer answered. “However, I am here with a message from the general now. He would have asked you to dine with him, but hearing of the state of your brother he could not ask you to leave him for so long a time; but he would be glad if you would come to see him for an hour this evening. He wishes to know

how you managed to pass through the German lines, and he also desires to be informed, as far as you can give such information, of the number and position of the enemy. What surprises us all more than any thing is that the despatches are dated the morning of the 13th instant, and you were picked up by the Farcey upon the evening of the 16th. It seems incredible that you should have done the distance and managed to get through the German lines in the time. Only one other messenger has got through, and his despatches were more than ten days old when they reached us, and had been forestalled by some pigeons. Your news is six days later than any we have received."

"We slept on the night of the 13th at Montargis," Ralph said, "on the 14th at Melun, on the 15th at Versailles, and last night, as you know, here."

"I must not get the information before the general," the officer said, with a laugh. "It is half-past six now; the general dines at seven. At what time will you be with him? Shall we say nine?"

"I will be there at nine," Ralph said; "but the general will, I hope, excuse my coming either in uniform or full dress of any kind. I have, of course, nothing with me."

"General Trochu will, of course, understand that," the officer said. "Good-bye."

Ralph now went back to Percy's room. The doctor had just come. He was accompanied by another medical man. Ralph stood by in silent attention while the doctor felt Percy's pulse, and asked a few questions of the nurse. They then gave some orders, and said that fresh medicine should be sent in in a quarter of an hour, and that they

would come in again at ten o'clock to see how he was going on.

"What do you think of him, sir?" Ralph asked, as the doctor came out.

"He has a sharp attack of brain fever," the doctor said; "but he is young, with an excellent constitution. I trust we shall pull him through. I cannot say anything for certain at present, till the fever takes a turn one way or the other, but I have strong hopes."

Ralph ordered some dinner to be sent up to his room, for he began to be keenly awake to the fact that he had eaten nothing for more than twenty-four hours. After he had taken the meal he sat in Percy's room until it was time to go to General Trochu's, keeping himself, however, in a position so as to be hidden by the curtain, for the sight of him evidently excited the patient. Percy was, as far as his brother could see, in just the same state as before: sometimes talking to himself in disconnected sentences, sometimes raving wildly, and imagining himself repeating the scenes through which he had passed since he left home.

At nine o'clock exactly Ralph sent in his name to the Governor, and was at once shown in. The general had already left the table, and was smoking in a small study. With him were Generals Ducrot and Vinoy. General Trochu rose and shook him cordially by the hand, presented him to the other generals, and asked him to take a cigar and sit down.

"Generals Ducrot and Vinoy are surprised, I see, at your appearance, Captain Barclay," General Trochu began. "By-the-way," he interrupted himself, "you are

in the Gazette this morning as captain." Ralph bowed and expressed his thanks. "No thanks are due at all, Captain Barclay," the old veteran said. "You have well earned your promotion, and Gambetta, who speaks of you, I may say, in the highest terms, tells me that he promised you the step if you got in. I need not say that whether he had done so or not I should have given it to you. But I was saying, I see Generals Vinoy and Ducrot are surprised, as I am myself, at your appearance. Gambetta in his letter twice uses the expression young officers. Once he said 'these young officers have greatly distinguished themselves, and have gained the cross of the legion of honour;' and again he says, 'these young officers have volunteered to carry despatches.' Naturally my friends were looking for a younger man, and having only seen you for an instant last night, and not having observed your features specially, I confess that I was expecting a younger man. You see," he said, with a smile, "we can quite understand Gambetta's calling your brother a young officer, for he is a mere lad, but one would hardly have applied the same term to yourself."

Ralph had flushed crimson at the commencement of this speech. "I must apologize very greatly, General," he said, when the Governor of Paris stopped. "For the mistake is certainly due to my own forgetfulness." His hearers looked surprised. "I slept until five o'clock this afternoon," Ralph continued, "owing, I believe, to a powerful opiate that the doctor you kindly sent us, gave me. Since I woke my thoughts have been entirely given to my brother, and the thought of my singular appearance never entered my mind. I have become so accustomed in

the few days since I left Tours, to this beard, moustache, and hair, that I never thought of them for a moment. Had I thought of it, I could not have presented myself before you this evening, for I should not have presumed to do so in my present state, and it will take me some hours of hard work, and not a little pain, before I get rid of them, for they are fastened on with shoemaker's wax, and I fear will not come off without taking a considerable portion of skin with them."

The three generals laughed heartily at Ralph's apology, and their own mistake, and General Trochu then asked him to give them a full account of what had happened to him, what he had seen, and what information he had gained since he left Tours. Ralph told the story unaffectedly, from beginning to end, and received warm commendation from his listeners.

"Your story began at Tours," General Trochu said, "where had you last been before that?"

"We had only arrived ten days before from a German prison," Ralph answered.

The generals all laughed. "You are adventurous fellows, you and your brother," General Vinoy said. "How did you get taken, and how did you get out?"

Ralph again told his story. "You are cool hands, you Barclays," General Ducrot said; "how did you get commissions first; were you at the Polytechnic or St. Cyr?"

"No, General," Ralph said modestly, "we had no such advantages. We won our commissions, and the cross of the Legion in the Vosges as franc-tireurs."

"In which corps?" General Trochu asked, a little

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sharply. "They have not done any very great things, the franc-tireurs."

"We were in the franc-tireurs of Dijon," Ralph said, a little proudly. "We several times beat superior forces; we blew up the bridge of the Vezouse, and should have blown up the tunnel of Saverne had it not been for treachery."

"Yes, yes," General Trochu said, "I remember Gambetta has once or twice mentioned your corps especially. You see, we don't hear much from outside. Let us hear of the affairs you have mentioned. Your account will give us a better idea of the state of things in the Vosges than fifty despatches would do."

Thus asked, Ralph gave an account of the doings of the corps from the day they arrived in the Vosges to the day he had left them, reduced to a fourth of their original strength. The three generals sat and smoked their cigars while he spoke, asking questions occasionally.

"Very good," General Trochu said, when he finished, and the other generals cordially assented.

"But how come you to speak German so well?" General Trochu asked; "and how was it you understood the English in which the officer spoke at Saverne?"

"We are English," Ralph said, and his hearers gave a simultaneous start of surprise. "That is to say, our nationality is English, though we are half French. Our father, an officer in the English army, was wounded, left the service, married a French lady, and settled in France for a time. We have been educated partly in England, Germany, and France, so that we speak the three languages nearly equally well."

“Well, Captain Barclay,” General Trochu said, “I am almost sorry that you are not French, for you would be a credit to any country. And now I think it is time to be going to bed,” and he drew out his watch. “Bless me, it is one o’clock. I had no idea it was so late. Good night. I will not ask you to call again for a day or two, as your brother will naturally occupy your attention and care. I trust that I shall soon hear good news of him.”

“Good night, Captain Barclay,” the other generals said cordially, each giving him their hands; and Ralph made his way across the dark streets—for there was no gas—back to his hotel. He went at once up to Percy’s room, and found that if not decidedly better, he was at least no worse, and the Sisters of Charity, who were nursing him, said that the doctors had spoken hopefully at their last visit. Ralph had intended to sit up all night, but the nurses assured him that he could be of no use whatever, and indeed, that he would be worse than useless, as his presence excited Percy. They themselves were keeping watch by turns. Accordingly Ralph, who still felt the effects of the cold immersion, went off to bed, and, in spite of the late hour at which he had risen, was in a few minutes sound asleep.





CHAPTER XVII.

A BALLOON VOYAGE.

FOR eight and forty hours Percy's fever and delirium continued unabated. At the end of that time he fell into a long sleep, and the doctor, as he felt his hand and heard his breathing, told his brother that he thought the crisis was over, and that he would awaken conscious. His prognostication turned out well founded, and to Ralph's intense delight Percy knew him when he opened his eyes. He was weak; weaker than Ralph could have supposed any one could possibly have become after only two days' illness. But he was fairly convalescent.

Ralph had scarcely left him during these two days, and had only been out once from the hotel. He had sent for a newspaper, to read for himself in the Gazette the promotion which General Trochu had notified to him, and after doing so he turned to another portion and there, among the lists of decorations given, were the names of Percy and himself as promoted to be commanders of the legion,

for having with extreme gallantry conveyed despatches from Tours to Paris through the German lines. It was after reading this newspaper that Ralph went out. His walk was not a long one. He went first to a tailor and ordered two captain's uniforms, for Percy was so nearly his own size, that except that his shoulders were an inch less in width, Ralph's clothes fitted him exactly. He then went to the Palais Royal, where there are several shops which sell nothing but medals and decorations, and bought two ribbons of the commander's rank in the legion of honour.

One terrible morning Ralph spent in a hairdresser's hands, and at the cost of no little pain got rid of all that mass of hair which had so transformed him. The stain was now nearly worn off the skin and Ralph was quite surprised when he again looked at himself in the glass.

"I was about beginning to forget," he said with a laugh, "that I was a boy after all."

The first day of Percy's convalescence he dozed a good deal, but the next day he woke much brighter and better.

"Look here, Percy," Ralph said, laying the ribbon before him; "that's better than medicine for you. There is the ribbon of a commander of the legion of honour. You can safely boast that you are the youngest who ever wore it, and earned it well too, old man; won't they be pleased at home? and we are both gazetted as captains."

Percy smiled with pleasure. His attack had been a very sharp one, but so short an illness, however severe, is speedily got over. The doctor had that morning said that all he wanted now was building up, and that in a

very few days he would be about. Indeed, Percy wanted to get up that day, insisting that he was quite strong. When he once stood up, however, he found he was much weaker than he had imagined, but sat up in an arm-chair all the evening. The next day he remained up all day, and three days after he felt strong enough to go to the Governor with Ralph to ask for their promised places in the next balloon. It was now the twenty-third of November. A carriage was sent for, and after some difficulty procured, for carriages were already becoming scarce in Paris. They drove up to the entrance and went in, but were told by an orderly—who could scarcely conceal his surprise at these lads in the uniform of captains of the staff, and with decorations scarcely ever seen except upon the breasts of superior officers—that the general was out. They turned and went out, but as they reached the steps a number of officers rode up.

“There is General Trochu himself, with Vinoy and Ducrot,” Ralph said.

The generals dismounted and came up the steps. As they did so their eyes fell upon the boys, who both saluted. They paused in surprise.

“What masquerade is this, young gentlemen?” General Trochu asked sternly. “Allow me to ask how you venture to dress up as Captains on the staff, and still more how you dare to put on the ribands of commanders of the legion of honour? It is no laughing matter,” he said angrily, as Ralph could not resist a smile. “It is a punishable offence, and your impudence in showing yourselves off at my door makes the matter the more unpardonable.”

"I see, General, that you do not remember us."

"I do not, sir," General Trochu said, looking at him sternly. "To the best of my belief I never set eyes upon you before."

The numerous staff of officers who had accompanied the generals, and who were scattered thickly around them, gave an angry murmur, for scarce one among them wore the coveted decoration.

"I am Ralph Barclay, and this is my brother Percy," Ralph said respectfully.

"Impossible!" the three generals exclaimed simultaneously, while there was a general exclamation of surprise from the officers round, for the courageous deed of the Barclays in making their way through the enemy's lines had been a general topic of conversation, and all Paris was familiar with their names.

"It is so, General," Ralph said respectfully. "I explained to you at the interview that I had the honour of having with you in the presence of Generals Ducrot and Vinoy, that it was the false hair which made all the difference, and that I was but little older than my brother."

The generals no longer doubted. They all shook both boys by the hand.

"I am astounded," General Trochu said; "astounded that two such mere boys as I now see you are should have accomplished what you have done. However, courage is of no age, and I do not think that there are any here"—and he turned to the officers round him—"who will not agree with me that these ribbons are worthily placed."

"No, indeed," was the general reply, and the officers all pressed round to shake hands with the boys, as they accompanied the Governor back into the house. General Trochu went at once into his private study, and told the boys to sit down.

"Now, what can I do for you boys?"

"M. Gambetta promised us that he would write to ask for us to have places in the first balloon which came out after we arrived," Ralph said. "Owing to my brother's illness I have not been able to ask before, but I am now anxious to leave as soon as possible, especially as the doctor says that change is desirable for my brother, and that he ought to have at least a month's nursing at home before he gets on horseback again."

"A balloon will start to-morrow morning," General Trochu said, "but if you choose to stay here, I will promise you both places upon my own staff, or upon those of Generals Ducrot or Vinoy, either of whom would, I am sure, be very glad to receive you."

"You are very kind, indeed, sir: very kind; and we feel greatly honoured by your offer," Ralph said gratefully. "Had we any intention whatever of remaining in the army we should accept it, with many thanks; but it is not so. We are English, and at the end of the war we leave France, and go back to live at home. We entered the ranks with no thought of winning promotion or favour, but simply from a sense of duty to the country to which our mother belonged, and in which we were born. There will, I suppose, be a great battle fought near Orleans shortly, and I should like to be present if possible, and Percy wants rest. Therefore, General, while

thanking you most warmly for your kindness, we would rather go out."

"Very well," the General said, "it shall be as you wish. There is certainly more chance of your seeing stirring service in the field than in here. I do not blame you for your choice. I will send a note at once to M. Teclier, who has charge of the balloon, to say that you will accompany him. Good-bye, lads, good-bye; you are fine young fellows, and your father has every right to be proud of you. Tell him so from me."

The boys rose, and bowed; but the General held out his hand, and shook theirs warmly.

Upon leaving the room they found several of the officers of the staff waiting outside, who begged them to stay and have a chat with them. Ralph at once accepted the invitation, upon the condition that Percy should have a sofa upon which to lie down, for his brother was looking pale and faint. They were most warmly received in a large drawing-room, in which were over a dozen officers of different ranks. Some bottles of champagne were opened, cigars were lit, and while Percy lay quietly upon the sofa Ralph chatted with the officers, relating, at their earnest request, several of their adventures in the Vosges, as well as the story of their entering into Paris. His new friends warmly pressed them to stop and dine with them, but Ralph pleaded that the balloon was to start at five in the morning, and that he wished Percy to lie down and get a good night's sleep before starting. The carriage had been discharged hours since, but one of the officers ordered a carriage of General Trochu's to the door, and after a hearty leave-taking the boys returned to their hotel.

“What a curious scene it is, Percy,” Ralph said. “Who would think that we were in a besieged city? Every thing looks very much as usual: the shops are open, people walk about, and chat and smoke, and drink their coffee or absinthe just as usual. The only difference is, that every one is in some sort of uniform or other. One does not see a single able-bodied man altogether in civilian dress; and at night the streets are very dismal, owing to there being no gas.”

“How much longer do they seem to expect to hold out, Ralph?”

“Another two months, anyhow; perhaps three, or even more. There seems to be a large stock of every thing, and every one is put on to a regular allowance, just enough to live upon, and no more.”

“I seem to have every thing I want, Ralph: lots of beef tea, and soup, and jelly, and so on.”

“Yes, Percy; but you obtain your food from the hospital. The hotel could not furnish any thing of the kind, I can tell you. Here we are. Now you lie down at once and get to sleep. I will wake you in plenty of time.”

At ten minutes before the appointed time the boys arrived at the Northern Railway Station, which presented a very different appearance to that which it ordinarily wore. No whistle of locomotives or rumble of heavy trains disturbed the silence of the station. A smell of varnish pervaded the whole place, and several empty balloons hung from the roof, undergoing the process of drying. The official, who had received them at the entrance, conducted them outside the station; and there, in the light of some torches, a great black mass could

be seen swaying heavily to and fro. The aeronaut was standing beside him.

"Here are the gentlemen who accompany you," the officer said to him.

"How are you, gentlemen?" he said cheerily. "We have a fine night, or rather morning: the wind is northerly. I suppose this is your first ascent?"

"Yes, indeed," Ralph said; "and I own I hope it will be the last. Have the despatches arrived?"

"No; I have the mail-bags, but not the despatches. Hush! there are a horse's hoofs."

A few minutes afterwards a railway official brought a note, which he delivered to M. Teclier.

"Bah!" he said, in an annoyed tone; "why cannot they be punctual."

"What is it, sir?" Ralph asked.

"A note from the General, to say that the despatches will not be ready for an hour. That means an hour and a half, and by that time it will be light enough to be seen, and we shall have to run the gauntlet. However, I suppose it cannot be helped. The best thing will be to pass the time as cheerfully as we can, and that certainly will not be in waiting out here in this bitter cold. I have, fortunately, a few bottles of excellent wine in the car, so I propose, gentlemen, that we go in to a fire, have a glass of wine, and smoke a cigar tranquilly."

M. Teclier gave a few directions concerning the balloon, and they then adjourned to a work-shed near, where a good fire was blazing for the use of the men employed in filling the balloon. Here the hour and a half of waiting passed pleasantly. At a quarter to seven

the despatches arrived. They were hastily placed in the car, in which everything else had already been packed. The Barclays took their place, the word was given "Let go all!" and in another instant the earth seemed to sink away from under them, and they were rising over the tops of the houses. The dawn had already broken, grey and uncertain. Light clouds were floating overhead. For two or three minutes not a word was spoken. The scene was so wonderful, the effect so extraordinary to the boys, that they were unable to utter a word. Every instant the earth seemed to sink away from them; every instant their view extended further and further, and the distant fields, villages, and hills seemed actually to spring into sight.

"It is wonderful!" Ralph said at last.

"Magnificent!" Percy responded.

"I wonder whether they see us?" Ralph said.

"We shall soon know," M. Teclier said. "We have crossed the river, and over the walls already. In another five minutes we shall be over their lines."

There were good telescopes in the car, and the boys directed them upon the immense panorama below them.

"What fort is that immediately beneath us?" Ralph asked.

"That is Vanves; the village you see there is Châtillon. Look out now, we may expect visitors in a minute."

He had hardly spoken before they heard a faint sound, followed by others similar.

"That is musketry," M. Teclier said. "Listen."

They did listen, and heard a peculiar whistling sound, which seemed below, around, and about them.

“That is a whistle of bullets ; there is no mistaking them,” Ralph said.

“We are too low,” M. Teclier said. “Throw out that bundle of newspapers ; we will go up a little.”

Ralph did so. “What would be the consequence if a bullet hit the balloon ?”

“No consequence at all, except that a slight escape of gas would take place. There, we are going into the clouds now, and they will not trouble any more about us.”

“I thought that we were going to have wind,” Ralph said. “The barometer at the hotel had fallen a good deal, and the clouds before we started looked like it ; but now we are once up here, we do not seem to move.”

In another two minutes they passed through the layer of clouds, and the sun shone brightly upon them. They looked down on a sea of white mist without a break.

“There,” Ralph continued, “we are entirely becalmed. These clouds below do not move, nor do we.

“You cannot tell that,” M. Teclier said. “We go in the same direction and at the same speed as the clouds. It is just as if you were in a boat at night upon a rapid stream. If you could see no banks or other stationary objects, you might believe yourself to be standing still, while you were being drifted forward at the rate of twenty miles an hour. We may be travelling now forty or fifty miles an hour ; and as I agree with you as to the look of the clouds before starting, I believe that we are doing so, or at any rate that we are travelling fast, but in what direction or at what rate I have no means whatever of

knowing. Even if we found that we moved relatively to the clouds below us, that would only show that this upper current was somewhat different from that below."

"But how are we to find out about it?" Percy asked.

"We must keep a sharp look-out for rifts in the clouds. If we could get a peep of the earth only for a minute, it would be sufficient to tell us the direction, and, to some extent, the speed at which we are going."

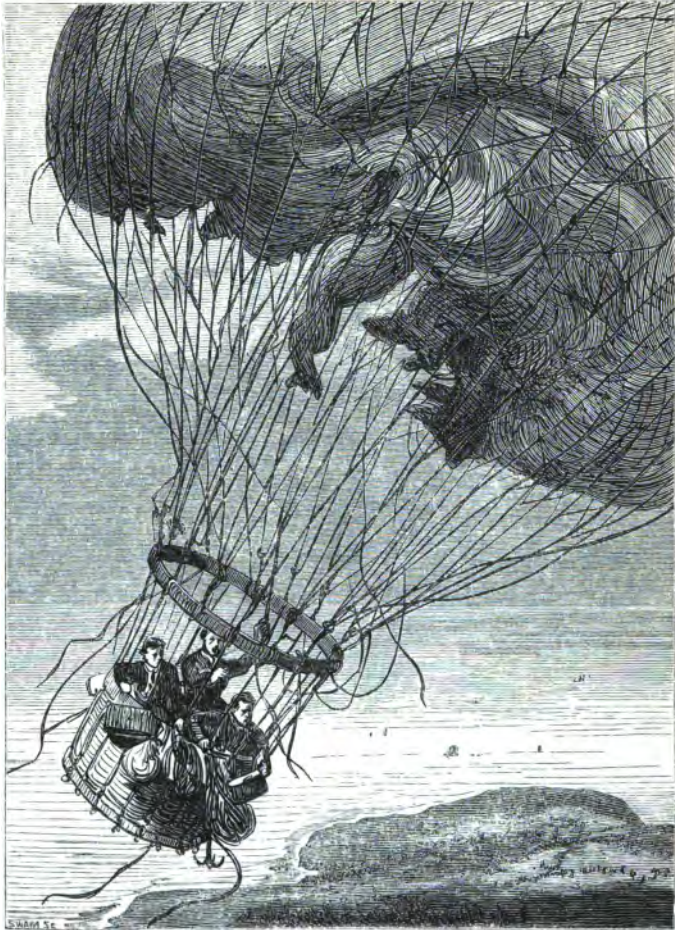
"The boys in vain hung over the side, the sea of clouds beneath them changed and swelled and rolled its masses of vapour over each other, as if a contest of some gigantic reptiles were going on with them. "There must be a great deal of wind to account for these rapid changes of form," Percy said after a long silence. "Suppose you see nothing of the earth? At what time will you begin to descend?"

"In five hours from the time of starting, at twenty-five miles an hour, supposing that the wind holds north, we should fall south of the Loire, somewhere between Orleans and Bourges. At eleven o'clock then I will let out gas, and go down below the clouds to see whereabouts we are. If we cannot recognize the country, or see any river which may guide us, we shall at least see our direction and rate of movement, and can either throw out more newspapers and keep on for awhile, or descend at once."

It was just ten o'clock when Ralph gave a sudden cry. "The sea!" he said; "the sea!"

"Impossible," M. Teclier said, hanging over the side; "I can see nothing."

"Nor can I now," Ralph said; "but I caught a



The Sea! the Sea!—Page 303.

glimpse just now, and I will almost swear to its being the sea, though how we could get there I don't know."

"If it is," the aeronaut said, "the wind must be blowing half a gale up here, and must have changed entirely either to the west or south. It is too serious to hesitate; we must find out if your eyes have not deceived you." So saying he pulled the valve. "Keep a sharp look-out, and look at the compass."

"There, there!" the boys cried, as the clouds opened again for an instant.

"It is the sea, and we are going west."

"Then we are over the Atlantic," M. Teclier said.

The gas was roaring from the valve above, and the balloon sank rapidly into the stratum of clouds. For a minute all was silent, and then a cry broke from them all. They were a considerable distance from the coast, and were driving along with great rapidity. Immediately under the balloon was an island of no great size, and beyond that no land whatever was visible.

"We must descend on that island or we are lost. It is our only chance." The valve was still open, and its influence was easily seen, for the balloon sank rapidly down through the opening of the clouds.

"We shan't be down in time," the boys exclaimed simultaneously.

It was but too evident. The balloon, when the first general view of the situation had been obtained, was fully a mile high, and was travelling seaward at the rate of thirty miles an hour. The island at the point at which they were crossing was about three miles wide, but they had passed fully half a mile over it before they obtained a

fair view. In five minutes, therefore, they would be beyond the land again, and they had to fall a mile in that time.

"Cut the balloon to pieces," M. Teclier said. "Tear it up; we must risk every thing."

The boys seized the silk, tore and hacked at it, as did the aeronaut. In two minutes a vast quantity of gas had escaped from the rents, and the silk was doubled up near the top of the net.

"That will do," M. Teclier said. "We shall be down in time now."

The boys looked over the car, and, accustomed as they had been to face danger, were appalled.

"It is all up with us this time," Ralph said; "we shall be smashed altogether."

"No," the aeronaut exclaimed. "The silk is acting as a parachute now, and checking the descent. Now help me to throw out all the bundles."

They did so, working silently and with difficulty, for the car was oscillating so greatly, that they were obliged to hold on by its side not to be thrown out. When the car was empty they looked out again. The descent was less rapid than it had been but was still sufficiently alarming.

"Is there a chance?" Ralph said.

"We shall get off with a shaking," M. Teclier said. "The car is made of wicker-work and is as elastic as a ball. Drop the grapnel now, in another minute we shall be within holding distance."

As the balloon neared the ground the oscillation became less violent and the pace diminished.

"The grapnel is on the ground," Percy said, looking over.

"Hold tight, hold tight," M. Teclier said warningly. "We shall catch fast on to those trees."

There was a tearing and rending, a series of tremendous jerks and then a bump against the ground, which threw them all into the bottom of the car, from which the next jerk threw them out on to the ground. Fortunately the ground was even, and the soil had lately been ploughed, but the shock was so violent that it was some minutes before either of the boys recovered consciousness. When they did so they found that two or three gentlemen were leaning over them, while several peasants were endeavouring, under the direction of M. Teclier, to hold the balloon, which was thrashing the ground with great violence.

"Thank God you are all alive," one of the gentlemen said. A peasant now came running up with some water. The gentleman who had spoken dashed a little in their faces.

"I do not think any of your limbs are broken," he said. "Do you feel any pain?"

"I feel sore and bruised all over," Ralph said, getting up with some assistance; "but I don't think that anything serious is the matter. How are you, Percy?"

"I don't think I am hurt seriously, Ralph, but I would rather lie still for the present."

Ralph explained to the gentleman, who again leant over Percy and felt his pulse, that his brother had been recently ill and was still weak.

"Ah, that accounts for it," the gentleman said. "I

do not think that he is seriously hurt. I am a doctor, and was luckily out riding with these gentlemen when we happened to look up and saw your balloon falling like a stone from the clouds. We thought at first that you must be dashed to pieces, but when we saw that the speed was being a little checked we had some hope, and galloped in the direction in which it was falling. We were within five hundred yards when you fell, but we hardly expected to see anyone alive. Do not try to move," he said to Percy. "We sent a man for a vehicle and a few necessaries before we set off ourselves."

"Where have we fallen?" Ralph asked. "We were astonished to find ourselves over the sea, for the wind was north when we started."

"You have fallen upon Belle Isle," the gentleman said, "so the wind must have changed materially since you started."

M. Teclier now came up. "I must really congratulate you both," he said to Ralph, "upon your coolness and presence of mind in a very frightful position. The oldest aeronaut could not have shown more nerve."

"You see," Ralph said, "we have been pretty often in danger now, and although the sort of danger was new, the degree of danger was not."

The gentlemen smiled a little as Ralph spoke. The Barclays had come out in plain clothes, bringing their uniform in the balloon, for in the event of the balloon having fallen among the Germans, it was of course essential that they should be able to get off unobserved. They therefore looked mere lads, and their talk of having passed through as great a danger as that which had just made

the spectators of it feel faint and sick only to witness, appeared to be a mere bit of exaggerated braggadocia. A light cart now arrived, in which some mattresses had been laid, some bandages, and other surgical necessaries had also been added, together with a bottle of brandy.

“Fortunately we do not want any of these except the brandy,” the surgeon said. “A little of that will do you all good. Now a few strips of plaister”—this was to M. Teclier, whose face was cut a good deal—“and then you will do till you get to the town.”

The three voyagers were now helped into the cart, for they were all very stiff and greatly shaken, and were glad to stretch themselves out on the mattresses, covered over with blankets, until they reached the little town. Here they were met by the whole population cheering lustily. Another waggon had been sent off for the balloon, and a number of people now set out to search for the bags of despatches, etc., which had been thrown out during the last part of the descent. The sous-prefect at the island placed his house at once at their disposal. But they said that they would rather go to an hotel first and take a hot bath, which the doctor recommended them, but should be very happy to breakfast with him after that. Before going to the hotel, however, M. Teclier sent off a despatch to Tours saying that he had arrived at Belle Isle with news from Paris at a quarter to seven, and that at that time every thing was going on well. He next inquired as to means of reaching the main land. The wind was dead off shore, and a sailing vessel would have taken a long time to make the passage. However there was a small steamer in harbour, and the sous-prefect took upon himself to en-

gage that the fires should be lighted at once and that they should cross in two or three hours. After reaching the hotel they were examined carefully by the surgeon, who pronounced that no harm whatever had been done to them, and that they had escaped with a few contusions and a good shaking.

The breakfast was quite an ovation. All the principal people of the place were assembled, and when M. Teclier entered, followed by the young Barclays, the gentlemen clapped their hands and cheered, and the ladies waved their handkerchiefs. After breakfast the sous-prefect proposed an adjournment into the drawing-room, and now the voyagers each became the centre of a knot of questioners as to the voyage. M. Teclier, as was natural, conversed with the sous-prefect and other leading men of the town, while their wives and daughters gathered round the lads. Ralph had given his name as Barclay, and had stated that Percy was his brother; but he had said nothing as to their being in the army, as he wished to avoid the oft-repeated tale which the declaration of his rank was sure to necessitate. He had even said a word to M. Teclier, begging him to say the Messrs. Barclay, instead of Captains Barclay, unless, of course, he were actually questioned upon the matter. Percy was allowed to sit in an easy-chair unmolested, for he was quite done up, and Ralph talked for both, relating many details of their journey from Paris; and the ladies examined him most minutely as to his sensation, and especially whether he was not horribly frightened.

Among those standing in a group round the young Barclays was a lieutenant of Mobiles, who evidently by

no means approved of the attention and interest which they excited among the ladies, and who had made several sarcastic remarks during the course of the narrative. Presently a servant came in, and, walking up to M. Teclier, said that two swords had been picked up; had they fallen from the balloon?

“Yes,” M. Teclier said, “they belong to those gentlemen.”

The servant came up to Ralph, and told him that the swords had been picked up. Ralph at once drew out a five-franc piece, and asked the servant to give it to the man who had found them.

“Ah,” said the officer of Mobiles, with a scarcely concealed sneer, “so you have come out from Paris to serve? I should have imagined that there were plenty of opportunities to distinguish yourselves there. However, you must have had good interest to get places in a balloon.”

“We have fair interest,” Ralph said calmly, “as apparently you have yourself. Each of us have, you see, used our interest in the way most pleasing to us. We have used ours to enable us to go with the army in the field instead of being forced to remain inactive in Paris. You upon your part have used yours to get away from the army in the field and to remain inactive here.”

These words were spoken with such an air of boyish frankness, and an apparent innocence of any desire to say any thing unpleasant, that every one within hearing was ready to burst with laughter at Ralph’s hit, which happened to be thoroughly well deserved.

The officer turned white, and would have burst out into a violent answer had not a couple of friends at his elbow begged him to restrain himself. The boy evidently

meant nothing; besides, he was only a boy, and what could be done with him? Besides which, again, one of them put in, though he was only a boy, he looked an awkward customer. This latter argument weighed more with the lieutenant than any other.

Ralph was not yet seventeen, and looked much younger than a French lad of the same age would do; but in point of size he was considerably taller than the officer of Mobiles, and his broad shoulders gave promise of unusual strength. There was, too, a look of fearlessness and decision about his face which marked him emphatically as an "awkward customer." Seeing this the lieutenant burst into a constrained fit of laughter, and said that it was "very good—really very good, for a boy." Every one else was so occupied in the endeavour to stifle their laughter that the lieutenant again took up the part of questioner.

"I suppose, young gentleman, that you come from St. Cyr or the Polytechnic, although I should hardly imagine that you have completed your studies in either of them."

"I have not the advantage of having been at either of the military academies," Ralph said quietly. "Have you?"

Again there was a laugh, and by this time most of those in the room had gathered round.

"May I ask to which arm of the service you belong?" the officer asked, with difficulty keeping his temper.

"You may ask, certainly, and I have no objection to answer," Ralph said. "My brother and myself both belong to the general staff."

The officer looked surprised.

“Have you served already, sir, or has your service yet to commence?”

“I have seen some little service already,” Ralph said.

“May I ask what general has had the benefit of your assistance?” the lieutenant said, with an affectation of politeness.

At this moment the sous-prefect pushed forward.

“Silence, sir!” he said to the officer. “There has been too much of this. These gentlemen have performed a great service to France and are my guests, and I look upon it as a personal attack upon myself.”

“Excuse me, sir,” Ralph said, rising from his seat for the first time. “I am grateful to you for your interference in my behalf; but I can make no claim upon the present occasion to have rendered any service to France. I had nothing to do with the despatches, nothing to do with the balloon. I came out as a passenger, upon my private desire and pleasure, at the risk of course of being killed. Undoubtedly I nearly was killed, and I look upon the entertainment that you have given us, as a kind congratulation upon our not having broken our necks. Kindly, then, permit me to answer this officer for myself; I think I can hold my own.”

The sous-prefect shrugged his shoulders, to signify that in that case he washed his hands of the whole business.

“Now, sir,” Ralph said, “I will answer the question. The general upon whose staff my brother and myself served was General Cambriels.”

The officer shrugged his shoulders.

“Since that time,” Ralph said, more sternly than he had yet spoken, “my brother and myself have had the

offer of posts upon the staffs of General Trochu, General Ducrot, and General Vinoy."

"Oh, come now," the lieutenant said, with a laugh of derision, "that is a little too strong. Imagine a scramble upon the part of Trochu, Ducrot, and Vinoy for the services of these very young officers."

This time the speaker had the laugh with him, for no one could believe that Ralph could be speaking the truth. Ralph grew a little pale.

"M. Teclier," he said, "do me the favour to introduce my brother and myself to this lieutenant of Mobile in due form." The matter had now become so serious that there was a dead hush in the room while M. Teclier advanced. He had once or twice already made a motion of coming forward to take Ralph's part, but a motion from the latter had arrested him. He was aware of the furore which the gallant and successful expedition of the Barclays had created in Paris, and he had been greatly struck and pleased by the calmness of the boys in a great, and to them altogether new peril. He now advanced slowly.

"May I ask your name, sir, and regiment?" he said to the officer.

"Lieutenant Desmaret, of the Mobiles of Vienne," the officer said, frowning.

"Lieutenant Desmaret, of the Mobiles of Vienne, I beg to introduce you to"—

"No, sir," the officer said, passionately, "you introduce them to me, not me to them; the inferior rank is introduced to the superior."

"I know perfectly well what I am doing, sir, and require

no lesson from you," M. Teclier said, quietly. "I repeat, I introduce you, Lieutenant Desmaret, of the Mobiles of Vienne, to Captain Ralph Barclay, and Captain Percy Barclay, Staff-Officers, and Commanders of the Legion of Honour." There was a dead silence of surprise throughout the room.

"Is it possible?" the sous-prefect said, coming forward again, "that these gentlemen are the Captains Barclay, of whom the Paris papers, which we received three days since, were full of, as having passed through the German lines, and having swam the Seine at night under fire? They had previously been decorated for great acts of bravery in the Vosges, and were now made Commanders of the Legion. Is it possible that you are those officers, gentlemen?"

"It is so, monsieur," Ralph said; "we had the good fortune to distinguish ourselves; but, as we did not wish to make ourselves conspicuous by new uniforms and new ribbons, we have put aside our uniforms until required for service, and asked M. Teclier to be silent upon the subject. Of course, we could not guess that upon our way we should meet so rude and unmannerly a person as Monsieur the lieutenant of the Mobiles of Vienne."

The lieutenant stamped his feet furiously. "You shall answer to me, sir," he said, "for this insult."

"Stop, sir," Ralph said, in a steady voice, which silenced those who were about to interfere. "You have asked me questions with rare freedom. I have answered them. I am now going to give you my opinion of you, and my advice to you, equally freely. If you mean by what you have said, that you are going to challenge me

to a duel, I tell you at once that I shall not accept it. I have, sir," and he raised his head proudly, "proved my courage, and France has recognized it in the rank and honour she has given me. We English, for I am English, do not fight duels; but I will make an exception. When you, M. Desmaret, come to me decorated as I am, or having in any signal way proved your courage and devotion to France, I will meet you. At present I see that you, an officer in the French army, well in health, are staying here in idleness instead of being in the field. Go and fight the enemies of France first, M. Desmaret, and after that talk, if you like, about fighting her friends."

There was a loud exclamation of applause and satisfaction at these words from those who had been looking on at this unpleasant scene, and the sous-prefect warmly shook Ralph by the hand.

"Well said, Captain Barclay, well said, indeed. I believe I may say that every one here agrees with you entirely. There are too many officers continually absent from the army upon 'private affairs,' and those of M. Desmaret have taken longer to arrange than usual, for he has been staying here for five weeks now. However," he said significantly, "he will hardly prolong his stay in the island. Enough upon that subject," he said, as M. Desmaret left the room, pale and furious. "I am glad, I am proud, sir, to make the acquaintance of yourself and your brother, and I can really at heart feel grateful to that fellow for having forced you to declare who you are; had he not done so, you would have left without our knowing that we had you among us."

There was now quite an ovation to the boys, the ladies

especially would hardly conceive that it was possible that these quiet-looking young fellows had performed feats of such daring. They now begged to hear the details of the adventures, but at this moment word was brought that steam was up, and the vessel ready to start, and as M. Teclier was most anxious to get on, and as Percy was quite done up, Ralph was glad to seize the excuse, and to make his apologies for leaving at once. The sous-prefect, all the breakfast party, and a large proportion of the population of the little place accompanied them thence to the landing-place, and then, amidst hearty cheering, the little steamer, carrying the voyagers, the despatches, and the remains of the balloon, started for the main land.





CHAPTER XVIII.

A DAY OF VICTORY.



AFTER travelling all night, the Barclays arrived at Tours at ten o'clock on the morning of the day after that upon which they had left Belle Isle. At the station they said adieu to M. Teclier, who went at once to Gambetta with the despatches, while the Barclays turned away to Colonel Tempé's lodgings, and to their great surprise as well as delight, found him in.

The colonel gave quite a shout of joy when he saw them. "Ah, my brave boys, my brave boys, I am glad to see you," and he took them in his arms and kissed them as heartily and as earnestly as if he had been their father. "I am glad to see you," he repeated, wiping his eyes with his handkerchief. "I was sure you would do it, I never really doubted; I told Gambetta it was as good as done, but I could not help being nervous, horribly nervous, and when the news came five days ago, by the balloon which left three days after you got in, I almost lost my head, I laughed, I cheered, I shook everyone by the hand, ma foi, I don't know

what I did, I was so pleased. Your Irishman was the funniest thing. He was not surprised, or pleased, or even interested. I explained to him over again, thinking he did not understand, but he only shook his head, and said in his strange English, 'Sure colonel, I never doubted them for a moment, arn't they clever enough to decaive the ould gintleman himself? It was as sartin as peas is peas that they would slip in somehow, and if they did get into a scrape, that they were the boys for getting themselves out of it. It's the coming out I am afraid of.' I looked surprised, naturally enough, and he went on, 'and doesn't your honour know that they are talking of coming out in a balloon? only to think of it, colonel, flying through the clouds, shut up in a big ball of silk! it's just flying in the face of Providence. What's the use of scheming, or of courage, you can't decaive a cloud, though it's as aisy as dancing to take in a German. When you tell me colonel, that they're safe out of the balloon, then I'll shout as loud as you like.' Yesterday, when the telegram from Teclier came, saying that he had fallen in Belle Isle, had had a narrow escape of being driven into the sea, but had avoided that by running the risk of breaking his neck, and mentioned that you were with him, and had like himself escaped with a few bruises, Tim went nearly out of his mind with joy. He has been cleaning his sword and accoutrements this morning. I am off to-morrow, and you are only just come in time to see the fighting. But you are looking ill, Percy; far too ill for service just at present."

"Yes, he has been very ill," Ralph said, "he had a touch of brain fever the night we got into Paris, and was delirious for two days. He has picked up quickly, but that balloon descent was not the thing for an invalid.

The doctor in Paris ordered a month, at least, of absolute rest, and has given him a sick certificate."

"He needs rest, certainly," Colonel Tempé said, "but he cannot go home at present. The Prussians hold Dijon in considerable strength. There are far too many people in the town who have heard of your connexion with the franc-tireurs. Some spy or other would be certain to peach."

"Yes," Ralph assented, "we have been talking it over, and quite agree that Percy could not go back, as although he would willingly run the risk himself, it would bring such serious consequences upon them at home if he were found there, that he has determined to go down to Nice for a while, and rejoin as soon as he gains strength again."

"Yes, Colonel Tempé said, "but above all things do not let him be in a hurry. You have gone through an immense deal, Percy, and have done a great deal more than your share for France, and have gained great honour and credit. Be content with that. You might ruin your constitution for life by further exertions."

"But about yourself, colonel, where are you going?"

"I am starting to-morrow to join General Chanzy's staff."

"I have not heard his name before," Ralph said.

"He commands the 16th Corps. He has not had much opportunity yet, but he is a good soldier. If you like, Ralph, I will go with you at once to Freysinets, and get you attached with me."

"Thank you very much, colonel; I should like it of all things."

"Come along then, Freysinets is in his office."

Percy accompanied them to obtain a signature to his leave of absence, and left next day for the south.

An hour later Colonel Tempé and Ralph were in the train, upon their way to Orleans. Tim, again in his hussar uniform, and half wild with delight, being, with Colonel Tempé's orderly, in charge of the horses.

Colonel Tempé, as Ralph was not mounted, had offered to lend him one of his own, but Ralph had refused it, unless the colonel would sell it, as he said he should be always afraid of getting the animal shot unless it was his own. Seeing that Ralph was determined upon this score, the colonel had reluctantly agreed to take the sum he had paid for the horse, Ralph's only other purchase in Tours was a great fur coat.

"And now, colonel," Ralph said, when the train had started, "we have time to talk—tell me what chances have we of success."

"Between ourselves, Barclay," Colonel Tempé said, "I do not think that our prospects are brilliant. In my opinion, Aurelles de Paladines, or rather Gambetta, for it was he who ordered the advance, made an immense mistake in attacking Von der Tann when he did. Of course, he drove him back and took Orleans, but what was the use of that? Absolutely nothing. He was not strong enough to push his advantage, but the movement served to draw the attention of the Germans to his force, and Prince Frederick Charles, who was marching south from Metz, has been hurried towards Orleans, and has now united his forces with those of Von der Tann and the Duke of Mecklenburg, so that, although we have received large reinforcements, for the whole of the army of the East

is up now, the Germans have been equally reinforced, and are quite as strong as we are. We ought never to have attacked until we were ready to follow up our advantage at once. It was nothing short of madness; but what can you expect with a civilian acting as Commander-in-Chief? I believe that we shall make a tough fight of it, but I can hardly hope that our new levies can prove a match for the veterans of Frederick Charles."

"When do we begin, do you think?"

"In two or three days at latest. You have not seen a great battle yet, Barclay."

"No," Ralph said, "nor shall I see much of it now, for the country is so perfectly flat that it will be impossible to get any thing like a general view of it. Do you know, colonel, I feel a good deal more comfortable than I did during my last journey between Tours and Orleans; for although I thought that we should manage somehow to get through into Paris, still I could not conceal from myself that it was a very serious undertaking. How bitterly cold it is."

"It is, indeed," Colonel Tempé assented. "Being upon the staff, we shall no doubt manage to get a roof of some sort over our heads, but for the sentries it must be terrible. The tents d'abri, if the men can scrape away the snow and get an armful of straw to lie on, are snug enough; the men lie close together, and share their blankets."

Half an hour after arriving at Orleans, Colonel Tempé and Ralph were riding out upon the north road, followed by Tim Doyle and the colonel's orderly. The frost was keen, but the afternoon was bright and clear,

and as they cantered along the road, beaten flat and hard with the enormous traffic, their spirits rose, and Ralph regretted that Percy was not there to share in his enjoyments.

Colonel Tempé shook his head when the wish was mentioned. "No, no, Barclay, it is far better as it is; you are young enough in all conscience for this iron work of war; your brother has done far more than a man's share already, and will find it difficult enough to go back as a school-boy. He has escaped thus far almost by a miracle, but he was looking shaken and worn. I am glad that he is not here."

Three hours' riding took them to the little village near which General Chanzy was quartered. The 16th corps lay to the left of the French army, facing the Germans, who held the line of villages of Guillonville, Terminiers, and Conier. It was already dark when they arrived. The general's quarters were in a château, a quarter of a mile distant from the village.

When they reached it, they were at once shown in, and found General Chanzy leaning over a map, which he was trying to examine by the light of a solitary candle.

"How are you, Colonel," he asked, shaking hands with him heartily, for they were old friends, "I am very glad you have come, there is plenty to do, and few to do it, at least very few indeed who know any thing about their work. Who have you here?"

"Allow me to introduce Captain Barclay, General; Freysinet has attached him to your staff. He served with me in the Vosges, distinguished himself greatly, and won his lieutenancy and the cross. Since then he has been

into Paris. No doubt you saw the account of his swimming the Seine with his brother."

"Of course, of course," General Chanzy said warmly. "I am very glad to have you with me, Captain Barclay. You will not be long before you are at work, for the affair is just beginning. I have just got news that there has been some sharp fighting to-day at Beaurre la Rolande."

"With what results, sir?" Colonel Tempé asked.

"We gained a great deal of ground in the morning," General Chanzy said, "but they brought up reinforcements, and no material advantage is claimed. And now," the general went on, "as to quarters, you must shift for yourselves. Beds are out of the question, but you will find some empty rooms upstairs, and fortunately there is a little straw in the stable. The outhouses are extensive and you will be able to get your horses under shelter. I should advise you to see about them at once. In an hour we shall have something to eat. I cannot call it dining. Captain Barclay, will you kindly see to these matters? I shall be glad to go through this map at once with Colonel Tempé."

Ralph at once obeyed the order, much pleased with his new commander. General Chanzy was a man to inspire confidence in all those who served under his orders. He was a young man for a general, but was very bald, and had a quiet and thoughtful air which made him look older than he was. He was a man of few words, and had a sharp steady look which seemed to master at once the important points of any thing that was said to him. When he smiled the whole of his face seemed to light up.

"Just the man to serve under," Ralph thought to himself. "Cool, self-possessed, and with an eye that will see a weak point in a moment. Is my orderly still at the door?" he asked a soldier in the passage.

"Yes, sir, two orderlies with the four horses."

"Can you get me a light of any sort?" Ralph asked, "I want to go round to the stables and get the horses somewhere in shelter."

"I will get you a lantern, sir," the man said. "But I fear that you will find the place all crowded; but of course you can turn some of them out."

The orderly accompanied Ralph with a lantern across the yard, Tim and Colonel Tempé's orderly following. Round the yard were many cavalry horses tied to pegs, driven in close by the wall of the stables, so as to give them some little shelter from the intense cold. The poor animals stood side touching side for warmth. The orderly opened the door of one of the stables, and Ralph entered, and looked round by the light of the lantern. The horses were ranged together in the stalls as closely as they could stand, while the rest of the area was completely covered with cavalry soldiers, some sitting up smoking and talking, others already wrapped in their cloaks and stretched at full length. A sergeant, seeing the marks of Ralph's rank, at once rose to his feet and saluted.

"I have two horses here, sergeant, my own and one of Colonel Tempé's. General Chanzy told me I should find room here, but it does not look like it."

"I will turn two of these horses out, sir," the sergeant said.

"Is there no other place?" Ralph asked.

"They are all as full as this, sir."

"There is a little shed down at the end of the garden," one of the men said. "I noticed it this afternoon. The door was locked. I looked in, and it seemed a cowshed. I don't know whether any one is there. I will go down with you, sir, and show you the way, if you like."

The shed was soon found, and the soldier forced the door open with his sword bayonet. The place had, as he supposed, been a cowshed, but the walls and roof were in good order and the ground hard.

"This will do first rate, your honour," Tim said; "there is room for all four horses if they squeeze a bit, and for Jacques here and myself. I suppose, your honour, there will be no harm in knocking up some of this wood-work to make a bit of a fire? It's too dark to look for sticks to-night, and they would be so damp from the snow that the smoke would choke the bastes intirely, to say nothing of us."

"Well, under the circumstances, Tim, I agree with you; but don't do more damage than you can help, and only make enough fire to make the water hot for coffee and so on. You will be warm enough here with the four horses. You must go and see if you can get them some forage."

"But how about your honour's and the colonel's dinner?" Tim asked. "I haven't drawn rations, but I have got plenty of bread and meat in the havresack. I got them at Tours, for I thought there wouldn't be much to be had here."

"Thank you for thinking of it, Tim, but we dine with the General. When you have got the horses com-

fortable and lit your fire, one of you bring up our cloaks to the house. Keep the horses' saddles on with loosened girths : we may want them suddenly at any moment of the night."

The next morning General Chanzy said to Ralph, "I should recommend you, Captain Barclay, to spend an hour studying this map, and getting up from these lists the exact position of our forces. When you think you have mastered them, ride through the whole of the positions occupied by the corps, and, without exposing yourself, gain as good an idea as you can of the country beyond. To-morrow you may have to ride straight to certain points with orders, and it may save important time if you are thoroughly acquainted with the ground and position."

After a couple of hours' study of the staff map, so as to know every little by-lane and hamlet, for ten miles on either side, Ralph mounted his horse and went for a long ride. When he returned, Colonel Tempé told him that General Chanzy was gone over to General D'Aurelle's quarter to arrange the details, and that the attack was to take place the next day.

At five o'clock the general returned, and Colonel Tempé and the chief of his staff were occupied with him for two hours in drawing up the specific orders for each corps. Colonel Tempé had not been out all day, and he therefore offered his horse to Ralph, in order that Ralph's own might be fresh for the next day. Four staff officers set off in various directions with the despatches, and Ralph congratulated himself upon having been upon the ground he was now traversing once before that day, as even with that previous acquaintance it was hard work

to find the way through the darkness, from the snow altering the general appearance and apparent distance of each object. Thanks, however, to his ride of the morning, he reached the various corps to which he was despatched, without any serious mistakes in his way, and got back to head-quarters by eleven o'clock.

Tim was waiting up for him. "Sure, your honour, and it's a mighty cold night. I've got a pot of coffee on the boil in the stables."

"Thank you, Tim. I will just go in and make my report to the general, and then go off to bed. Bring the coffee into my room. We shall be up early, for we fight to-morrow."

"Do we, now?" Tim said admiringly. "And it's about time, for we should be all frozen into skeletons if we were to wait here doing nothing much longer. Bad luck to the weather, says I."

At ten o'clock the next morning the French troops were in motion, the objects of their attack being the villages of Guillonville, Terminiers, and Coniers. The country was extremely flat, and for an hour they saw no bodies of the enemy. A few videttes only were seen. These galloped off hastily the moment they caught sight of the heavy masses of the French debouching from the wood. Ralph was riding with the rest of the staff behind the general.

"That is Terminiers," Colonel Tempé said, pointing to a house or two at a distance on the plain.

As he spoke a puff of smoke came from the houses. "There is the first shell," was the general exclamation.

In another instant the missile burst near some in-

fantry at two hundred yards to the right. "Take orders to that battery there to take position on that little eminence to the left there, Captain Barclay. Tell them to keep the guns a little back among the trees, and to open sharply upon Terminiers."

It was just twelve o'clock now, and in five minutes there was a roar of cannon along the whole length of both lines. For half an hour the combat continued a mere artillery duel. The shells fell in all directions, cutting the dry branches from the trees, tearing up the ground, and leaving deep black gashes in the white snow, crashing through a wall, or occasionally exploding among the troops.

"Their fire is slackening a little," General Chanzy said; "it is time to be pushing forward. Lieutenant Porcet, take my orders to the colonel of that regiment of Mobiles to advance at once, covered by skirmishers. Captain Barclay, order that Line regiment to support. Captain Maillot, order the artillery to concentrate their fire upon the village, and to advance by batteries."

The orders were carried out, and the Mobiles advanced to within five hundred yards of the village. The musketry fire was now tremendous, and the Mobiles wavered. The Germans were entrenched in the gardens and walled enclosures of the village; every wall, every house was loop-holed, and rough barricades had been erected to fill up the breaks in the walls. General Chanzy was sitting on horseback a short distance in the rear of the fighting. Mounted officers rode up and left again every moment with news of the battle going on near the other villages.

“Ride up and order the Mobiles to lie down, Captain Barclay; then tell the colonel of the Line to bring his troops up in line with them. Let them lie down also. Tempé, have the two reserve batteries of artillery brought up at full speed to silence that battery in the wood to the left of the village. Its fire crosses the ground we have to pass over.”

Ten minutes more of continuous cannonading, and then it was apparent that the Prussian fire was weakening.

“Now, Barclay, tell them to charge at the double.”

Ralph set spurs to his horse, but just as he reached the troops a shell exploded just under his horse. Ralph heard a crash, felt a shock, and a whirling through the air, and then fell heavily upon the ground. Believing he was dangerously wounded, he made no effort to get to his feet, but sat up and shouted to the colonel of the Mobiles who were not thirty yards from him, “The Mobiles and Line are to charge at the double, and to carry the village with the bayonet.”

The Mobiles had flinched a little before as they had advanced with the deadly fire of shot and shell, but they did not flinch now, and leaping upon their feet with a cry of “Vive la France,” the Mobiles and Line soldiers literally made a race of it for the village. Ralph, after having given his message, lay back again with a sort of bewildered sensation. A minute afterwards he heard a rapid galloping, and Colonel Tempé rode up, followed by Tim Doyle.

“Are you badly hurt, my dear boy?” the former exclaimed as he leapt from his horse. “The General himself asked me to come and see after you.”

"I don't quite know, Colonel," Ralph answered; "I feel at present as if my head was knocked in and my legs shot off."

"You had a tremendous shake," said Colonel Tempé, who was with Tim by this time kneeling beside him, "and your horse is blown almost to pieces; but I don't think, as far as I can see at present, that you are hit anywhere. Here, take a sip of brandy, it will bring you round; you are stunned a little, you know. There, you are better now," he said, as Ralph, having drunk a little brandy, sat up and looked round.

"I am all right, I think, Colonel; don't stay any longer. Tim will wait here. I don't think I was stunned, else I could not have given the order. No, I imagine I had a near escape of breaking my neck. Please, don't wait. I shall be all right again in five minutes. I will take Tim's horse, and join you again. Tim will pick up a musket; there are plenty about; and do a little fighting on his own account."

Colonel Tempé jumped on his horse and rode off. In a minute or two Ralph was able to mount Tim's horse, and ride slowly up to the village, where a heavy musketry fire was still going on; but as no shell or shot were now coming in the direction in which Ralph was, it was evident that the French had taken the position, and had opened fire upon the retreating Germans. The fight still raged both to the right and left, but in another quarter of an hour it slackened also here, and the three villages were all in the hands of the French.

In a quarter of an hour Ralph felt quite himself again, and seeing one of his fellow staff officers

gallop up, he asked him where he could find the general.

“He is at Guillonville. But he will be here in a few minutes. The advance is to continue: we are to carry the villages of Monneville, Villepani, and Faverolles.”

In half an hour the troops were again moved forward; but this time the resistance was more obstinate than before, the Prussians having received reinforcements. Hour after hour the fight continued, the short winter day faded, and the gathering darkness was favourable to the assailants; and at half-past five they carried the villages by assault. The scene was a wild one. It was perfectly dark, save from the incessant flashes of rifle and cannon. In the streets of the village men fought hand to hand, some of the Germans, taking refuge in the houses, refused to surrender, others threw down their arms and cried for quarter. Shouts, screams, curses, cheers, the explosion of fire-arms and the clash of steel mingled in one wild and confusing din. When it ceased the village remained in the hands of the French, and the Prussians retreated sullenly into the darkness.

There was no rest for the staff for hours, they were galloping about carrying orders; but at last Ralph returned to Villepani, at which village General Chanzy had his head-quarters. At the door of the cottage which was pointed out as that in which the general was Tim was waiting.

“Faith, your honour, if this is war, I’ve had enough of it.”

“What is it, Tim?”

“What is it, your honour! here have we been fighting

all day, and not a blessed thing to ate or to drink. No one knows what became of the waggons, and here we are, without as much as a biscuit to ate ; and in such weather as this, too ; and another battle in the morning."

"Ay, Tim, it's bad enough, but think of the thousands of poor fellows lying wounded and freezing to death on the snow."

"I do think of them, Mister Ralph, and I've been at work ever since we got in here, carrying the poor creatures in from the garden and fields. There is not a house here that's not full from the top to the bottom. Have you lost the wallets off my saddle, your honour?"

"No, Tim ; why should I do that?"

"I don't know why you should, sir, but I have been making up my mind that you would all along ; either that you would have had it shot off, or that you'd throw it away to ase the horse. Now we shall do."

"Why, what's in the wallet, Tim?"

"Just a big chunk of bread, your honour. It was left on the table when you had breakfasted this morning, and I said to myself it may be useful before night, and so just slipped it into the wallet."

In another minute the bread was taken out and cut into two portions. "I would not eat it at all, to-night, Tim, if I were you," Ralph said, "it is not by any means too large for supper, but a mouthful in the morning will be a great comfort. I suppose there is no chance of getting any thing for the horse."

"Trust me, your honour. One of the first things I did when the firing was over was to pop into a stable and to get a big armful of hay, and take it out and hide it away

under a hedge. It was lucky I did, for the minute afterwards we could not have got a handful if we had offered a Napoleon for it."

"Where are you going to sleep, Tim?"

"Under that same hedge, Mister Ralph. The horse always lies down, and he's so tired he won't break the rule to-night; so I'll give him half the hay for his supper, and when he's laid down I'll put the rest between him and the hedge, and roll myself up in my cloak, and what with the cloak, and the horse, and the hedge, and the hay, not to mention the supper, I shall be as warm as a lord; and it's a comfort to think that there will be something to eat both for the baste and myself in the morning."

"Well, good night then, Tim."

"Good night, your honour." If Tim Doyle slept, there were not many of his comrades that did on that night. The cold was fierce in the extreme, and those who could obtain wood of any kind made fires and crouched over them; others lay on the ground, and huddled together for warmth; others dragged their feet wearily backwards and forwards. Many and deep were the curses poured out upon the intendance, or commissariat, whose utter incompetence throughout the war was one of the great reasons of the continuous bad fortune of the French.

When Ralph entered the room, he was saluted by a variety of voices. The only light was a dim lantern. The room was half full of officers, some dozing in corners, others sitting round the table smoking.

"Where is the General?"

"He has got a room about half the size of this for the use of himself, Tempé, and the chief of the staff. They

are writing, and will go on writing all night, I expect. These are the only two rooms not full of wounded in the whole village. You had a narrow escape to-day. We have had our share of casualties. Poor Maillet and Porcet are both killed, and we have three wounded. Were you hurt at all?"

"No," Ralph said; "but I was tremendously shaken, and feel stiff all over. I will lie down by the wall here and get a few hours' sleep."

And so ended the 1st of December.





CHAPTER XIX.

DOWN AT LAST.

AT half-past eight o'clock the next morning horsemen came dashing in with the news that the Germans were advancing in force. Stiff, many half frozen and half starved, it was an absolute relief to the men to have some break to the monotony of cold and hunger. They were already assembled under arms, and in a few minutes the artillery upon both sides was at work.

“I fear you will see that we shall be beaten to-day,” Colonel Tempé said to Ralph, as they mounted. “The men are worn-out with hunger, disgusted at the wretched mismanagement which sends them into a battle without having had food for twenty-four hours, and with no prospect whatever of it for another twenty-four. Besides, we ought to have been reinforced. Our line is too long, Ralph ; there is neither direction nor management.”

For a time the French held their position well against the tremendous artillery fire which was maintained upon

them. Gradually, however, the Germans pushed their heavy masses of troops forwards, and the French reserves had already been brought up.

Several of the Mobile regiments showed signs of wavering. General Chanzy rode backwards and forwards along the front of the position, exposing himself recklessly in order to give courage and confidence to his men. Cigar after cigar he smoked as tranquilly as if sitting in an arm-chair a hundred miles away from the din of battle. At last, after exchanging a few words with the generals of brigade, he called Ralph, who happened to be the only aide-de-camp unemployed, up to him.

“Captain Barclay,” he said. “Ride at once to General Sonis. Tell him that my division, not having received the promised reinforcements, must fall back. He has already sent to say he is hard pressed. Ask him to hold his ground if possible for another half hour, by which time I shall have fallen back towards the position I left yesterday morning, but will draw rather to my right, so as to keep our connections nearer and to afford him help if necessary.”

Without a word Ralph turned his horse and galloped off at full speed. A quarter of an hour's riding and he rode up to General Sonis, who was just calling upon several regiments, among whom were the Papal Zouaves, to make a charge.

This fine body of men, the Papal Zouaves, acquired, and justly acquired, more glory than any other French corps throughout the war. They behaved upon every occasion magnificently. In the first fight at Orleans, upon this 2nd of December, and afterwards at the battle of Le

Mans, the Zouaves of Charette fought with the courage of lions. A great many of them were men of good family ; all were inspired by the ardour and spirit of their chief. Their uniform was similar in cut to that of the French Zouaves, but was of a quiet grey colour trimmed with a little red braid. Ralph rode up and delivered his message.

“I am going to carry that position, sir,” the General said, “and in that case I shall not have to fall back at all, and General Chanzy can close up on me, throwing back his left so as not to be outflanked. If you wait a few minutes you will see the result of this charge. Now, gentlemen.”

So saying he rode with his staff in front of the line. “Forward, men,” he shouted, drawing his sword. Ralph had naturally fallen in with the staff and was now able to see and admire the daring of the proposed movement, which, if successful, would have changed the fortunes of the day.

Upon an eminence some three quarters of a mile distant were several batteries of artillery supported by a large body of infantry, who extended to within about half the distance between the French line and their own reserves. The fire was terrific, so terrific that several of the French regiments refused to advance. Others started, but withered away so fast under the deadly fire that only two corps besides the Zouaves persevered to the end.

The Zouaves advanced at a double, but with as much coolness as if on parade. They did not fire a shot, but made straight at the Prussian infantry. As they approached the enemy's line General Sonis and his staff fell

in between the Zouaves and a regiment of Mobiles next to them in order not to interfere with the fire.

"For God and France!" Charette shouted as he led the charge; and the whole regiment responded as one man, "For God and France!"

So fierce was this onslaught that the Prussian infantry refused to face it, and fell back upon their supports. Still the Zouaves rushed on, and again the Prussians fell back, but the assault was growing more and more hopeless: the Zouaves were unsupported save by a few hundred men, the other regiments were far in the rear, the shot and shell were mowing lanes through them, an army was in front.

At last they halted. Colonel Charette marched on in front waving his sword. General Sonis with his staff again rode forward.

It was heroic, but it was an heroic madness.

Again the Zouaves advanced. Again a storm of shell poured upon them, and then a regiment of German cavalry swept down. There was a crash: Charette and his officers disappeared beneath the hoofs of the cavalry. General Sonis and his staff went down like straw before them, but the Zouaves stood firm, fired a volley into them, and then, having lost eight hundred men in that desperate attempt to retrieve the fortunes of the day, the remainder retreated sullenly with their faces to the foe.

Ralph Barclay, when the cavalry swept upon them, had shot the first two of his foes with his revolver, and had then been cut down by a tall German dragoon just at the moment that his horse fell dead, shot through the head.

Ralph had a momentary vision of gleaming hoofs above

him, and then he remembered nothing more until he came to himself hours afterwards. His first sensation was that of intense cold. He endeavoured to rise, but was powerless to move hand or foot. He lay quiet for a few minutes, and then made another effort, but with a similar want of success. This time, however, he felt that his limbs would have moved had they not been fastened down by some weight. He now concentrated all his strength upon one arm. It yielded suddenly, and when it was free he was able to turn partly round so as to feel what it was that had confined it.

He found that his own blood and that of the horse had frozen his arm fast to the ground. It required a considerable effort before he could get altogether free, for he was stiff with the cold. Putting his sword up to his head he found that he had been saved by the very means which were now giving him so much pain. The intense cold had frozen the blood as it flowed, and staunched it more effectively than any surgeon could have done.

Ralph, after rubbing his hands and arms to restore circulation now endeavoured by the remains of twilight to see where he was and how he had been saved. His horse lay next to him and almost covering him. The poor animal had fallen on to its back, or had rolled over afterwards, and in the latter case it was fortunate indeed for Ralph that it had not taken another half turn. Had it done so it would have crushed him to death. As it was it had reached to within an inch or two of him, partly concealing him from sight, protecting him from the cold, and also greatly diminishing his chance of being trampled upon by cavalry passing over.



After the Battle.— Page 338.

A short distance off Ralph could see parties with lanterns, and one of them seemed approaching. Far in his rear he could hear an occasional shot, and it rushed across his mind at once that the French had been defeated and were falling back upon Orleans. These lights therefore must be in the hands of Germans.

The thought that a German prison awaited him, roused Ralph from his inactivity. It flashed across his mind that as he had escaped before, they would take care and give him but little chance of escaping again, and, although stiff and bruised from head to foot, half frozen, and faint from loss of blood, the hope of liberty roused him to new exertion. With some effort he got at the holster of his pistol in which was a flask of strong brandy and water, which, though icy cold, had yet a sensibly warming influence. The lights were still at some distance off, and Ralph, after considerable trouble, and after cutting the straps which fastened it to the saddle, succeeded in getting at his fur overcoat. This he put on, picked up the cap of one of the German troopers who had fallen near, and then walked slowly away over the deserted battle ground.

Ten minutes later he heard a horse's hoofs upon the hard ground. He cocked the pistol, which had remained fastened to his belt when he fell, pulled forward the German soldier's cap, and walked quietly on.

"Who goes there?" shouted a voice, and two German officers rode up. It was far too dark now to distinguish faces.

"Karl Zimmerman of the 7th Dragoons," Ralph said in German, saluting.

"What are you doing here?"

"I am servant to Lieutenant Falchen who fell to-day, and I had been to look for his body: it was somewhere about here when we charged the grey Zouaves."

"But your regiment is miles off," one of the officers said; "I saw them an hour ago."

"I don't know where they are, sir," Ralph said, "for I had my head laid open with a sword bayonet just as I was cutting down the man I had seen shoot my master. I was carried to the rear, but the surgeon had gone on, and my wound stopped of itself; and when I reached the hospital the doctors were so busy that I asked leave to go and see if I could find my master."

"Where are the ambulances now," one of the officers asked, as they turned to ride off.

"Over in that direction. Look, sir, there are some of the searchers with lanterns; they will direct you at once."

"Thanks," the officer said, riding off, "good luck in your search."

Ralph had noticed a cottage standing by itself at the edge of a wood at some little distance from the bivouac of the night of the 30th of November, and had stopped for a moment and asked a few questions of the woman who lived there. She had appeared a kind-hearted woman, full of hatred for the invader, and had two sons in the Mobiles who had marched north when Paris was first threatened, and who were now besieged there. For this cottage Ralph determined to make, in order, if the owners would receive him, to take shelter in the house; otherwise, to find a refuge in the wood itself, where he doubted not that they would assist him to lie hid for a few days. He had no great fear of a very active search being made

for fugitives at present, as the Prussians had only driven back two divisions of the French army, and had, Ralph believed, plenty of work on their hands for some time.

It was fortunate for Ralph that he had studied the ground so carefully, for he soon came upon the road, and the stars, which were shining brightly, gave him his direction and bearings. The battle had extended over the whole of this ground. Many times Ralph could hear groans, and saw in places dark forms thickly scattered over the ground, showing where a stand had been made, or where a regiment had lain exposed for hours to an artillery fire.

The distance was considerable to the place Ralph had marked out for himself. Eight miles at least, he thought, for it was away behind what had two days before been Chanzy's left. It was, in Ralph's state of feebleness, a very long journey. Over and over again he had to sit down and rest. He did not feel the cold now: the fur cloak and the exertion of walking kept his body in a glow. He took great pains, however, not to exert himself so as to make himself too hot, as he feared that his wound might break out if he did so. He was fully twelve hours upon the road, and daylight was just breaking in the east, when, exhausted by hunger, fatigue, and loss of blood, he crawled up to the door and knocked.

There was a movement inside, but it was not until he had knocked twice that a voice within asked,—

“Who is there?”

“A wounded officer,” Ralph said.

There was a whispered talk inside. “Let me in, my friends,” he said, “for the remembrance of your boys in

Paris. There is no danger to you in doing so, as if the Germans come you have only to say you have a wounded officer. I can pay you well."

"We don't care for pay," the woman of the house said, opening the door with a candle in her hand, and then falling back with a cry of horror at the object before her : a man tottering with fatigue, and with his face a perfect mask of stiffened blood.

"You do not remember me," Ralph said. "I am the captain of the staff who chatted to you two days ago about your boys in Paris."

"Poor boy !" the woman said compassionately. "Come in. Monsieur will pardon me," she went on, apologetically, "for speaking so, but I called you the boy-captain when I was telling my good man what a bright—— But there, what you want now is rest and food. The question is where to put you. We may be searched at any time, though it's not likely that we shall be for a few days ; the battle has gone away in the direction of Orleans, and we have not seen half a dozen men since I saw you two days ago. The first thing is to give you something warm ; you are half frozen. Sit down for a few minutes. I will soon make a blaze."

Ralph sunk down, utterly exhausted and worn out in the settle by the fireplace, and fell into a half doze while the woman lit a bright fire on the hearth. In a few minutes she had drawn some liquor from the *pot-au-feu*—the soup-pot which stands by the fireside of every French peasant, however poor, and into which all the odds and ends of the household are thrown. This liquor she put into a smaller pot, broke some bread into it, added an

onion, which she chopped up while it was warming, together with a little pepper and salt, and in ten minutes from the time of Ralph's entry she placed a bowl of this mixture smoking hot before him.

At first he seemed too exhausted to eat, but gradually his appetite returned, and he finished off the hot broth.

"What shall I do to your wound, sir?" the woman said. "It is a terrible sight at present."

"It is the cold which saved my life, I fancy," Ralph said, "by stopping the bleeding; but now it wants bathing in warm water for some time, and then bandaging. But where are you going to put me?"

"In the boys' room upstairs, sir: it is just as they left it."

"I have no doubt it is very comfortable," Ralph said, "but all this country is certain to be scoured by the enemy's cavalry. I do not want to be taken prisoner, and rather than that I would go and live out in the woods, and only crawl here once a day for some food."

The husband had now come down stairs, and as he aided his wife to bathe first and then bandage the wound, they talked over the matter, and agreed that Ralph could be hid in a loft over a shed a hundred yards from the house, and very much concealed in the woods, without much fear of discovery. The farmer at once started to make the place as comfortable as he could, and the wife followed with a couple of blankets a quarter of an hour later.

Ralph by this time could scarcely crawl along. The fever consequent upon the wound, the fatigue, and the cold made his head throb so terribly that he could

scarcely hold it up, and had it not been for the assistance of the farmer's wife he could not have crawled across the short distance to the shed. The loft was low and small, and when the wooden shutter of the window—or rather opening, for it was unglazed—was closed, it was lighted only by the light which came in at the crevices. The shed was altogether of wood, so that the shutter, which happened to be at its back, would scarcely have been noticed, while, from the shed being high and the loft very low, any one inside would scarcely have suspected the existence of any loft at all. It was reached by a ladder and trap-door.

The farmer assisted Ralph up the ladder. The shutter was open, and Ralph saw that the farmer had made a bed of straw, upon which his wife was spreading one of the blankets. Ralph now took off his uniform and lay down, and was covered first by the other blanket, and then with his own fur-lined coat. The farmer's wife had thoughtfully brought a pillow with her, and Ralph in a few minutes was lying in what, had it not been for the pain of his wound, would have been intense comfort after the cold and fatigue. His hostess went away and returned with a large jug of water and a glass, which she put down within reach of his arm. "There is nothing else you want?" she asked.

"Nothing, thank you, except to sleep," Ralph said.

"I shall shut this shutter," the farmer said: "enough light will come through the cracks to see well when your eyes get accustomed to the darkness. I shall shut the trap close down after me as I go, and lift down the ladder: it is very light, and my wife can easily put it into its place

again. We will come and see you again in the afternoon : good-bye."

"Good-bye," Ralph answered faintly, and before the sound of their footsteps had died away, he fell into a sort of feverish doze. For a time he turned uneasily, muttered incoherent words, and moved his hands restlessly : soon, however, the effects of the cloth soaked in icy-cold water, which the farmer's wife had placed on the bandages over the wound began to subside the feverish heat, and in half-an-hour he was sleeping soundly and quietly. He woke at last with a flash of light in his face, and, opening his eyes, saw the good woman again bending over him. "I am glad," were her first words : "I thought for a moment you were dead."

"No, no," Ralph said with a faint smile, "a long way from that yet. My sleep has done me a world of good. What o'clock is it?"

"Nine o'clock," his hostess said. "I could not come before, for I have had several parties going past, and the house was searched once. I kept on wondering whether you wanted me, until I nearly worked myself into a fever."

"Thank you," Ralph said ; "I have been all the better for being allowed to sleep on : I have had nearly thirteen hours of it. I feel queer about the head, but otherwise I feel all right. I am terribly thirsty."

"I have got nothing but water to offer you," the woman said ; "the Germans drank the last drop of our wine up months ago. But I had a few apples, and I have roasted them and put them in this jug of water : it will give it a taste, and is good for fever. In this jug is some herb tea,

which you must drink when you feel feverish. And now do you feel as if you could eat some broth?"

"That I do," Ralph said. His hostess put her arm under him, and raised him up into a sitting posture, in which she retained him by kneeling down beside him, and holding him up as if he had been a child. Then she gave him a basin of bread broth, and a drink of water, shook up his pillow, arranged the things over him, and put a fresh cloth dipped in water on his head. "Here is a box of matches," she said, "and here is the water and herb tea in reach of your arm. You're not cold, are you?"

"No, thank you," Ralph said, "and in spite of the sleep I have had, I feel as if I could go off again till morning comfortably."

"Be patient if I am late," the woman said; "I will come as soon as I can. If I am late you will know that there are Germans about."

Ralph's idea of his capacity for sleep turned out correct. It was still dark when he woke, but, striking a match, he found that it was nearly seven o'clock. He at once blew out the match, felt for the apple water, took a drink, and then nestled down deep into the fur coat.

"It will be getting light in another hour," he said to himself: "it's awfully cold, too; but I am better off here than I should be in the field. I hope she will be here soon, I want to know if she has any news. Well, there is only an hour to lay awake;" and almost as he murmured the words Ralph dropped off again, and slept until ten o'clock.

This time he woke with the slight creaking which the trap-door made. "How are you to-day M. le Capitaine?" his hostess said.

"I am getting on capitally, thanks to your care," Ralph said. "And what have you there?"

"Your breakfast and some plaister. My husband started yesterday evening to walk to the doctor, who lives twelve miles off. He told him all about you, but the doctor would not come himself; however, he sent word that the wound was to be washed well twice a day with warm water, and that a little lint is to be laid in it each time after the bathing; and when the inflammation ceases to look angry, I am to draw the edges together as closely as I can, and strap them together with these strips of plaister."

"It is very kind of your husband," Ralph said, "very kind. Did the doctor say how long I should be before I could be about again?"

"No," the woman said. "Jacques asked him, but he said that he could not say without seeing the wound, and examining you. Jacques described its position coming down from the back of the head, taking off just a little bit of the top of the ear, and then ending on the cheek-bone. He said that M. Le Capitaine must have a head as thick as a wall, or it would have killed him."

Ralph smiled, and his hostess set to work to carry out her instructions.

"Shall I take away your uniform and hide it away so that in case the enemy search and find you they will have no proof against you?"

"No, no," Ralph said. "The uniform shows I am not a franc-tireur, and so will prevent my being hung, and you having your house burnt over your head. Besides which I should be entitled to be treated as an

officer. My uniform is the best protection for us all. Have you any news of what is going on?"

"We heard firing yesterday," the woman said, "and to-day we can hear a constant booming from the direction of Orleans."

Ralph listened, but the bandage prevented his hearing any thing.

"You are very kind," he said, "but you can hardly think how I want to be off. However, I fear that I am here for a week at the very least. Just think what I am missing."

"It seems to me," the woman said, "you are missing a great many chances of being killed, which I should consider to be a very fortunate miss indeed. I should not like Jacques to have that gash on the head, but I would a great deal rather that he was lying here wounded just as you are, than to know that he was in the middle of all that fighting at Orleans. Be patient, my friend, we will do our best for you. If you have no fever, to-morrow Jacques will try and buy some meat and some wine for you at one of the villages, and then you will soon get quite strong."

When Ralph had eaten his breakfast he again laid down, and his kind hostess left him, as her husband was obliged to be out and at work, and it was necessary that she should be at home to answer any straggling troops of the enemy who might pass.

"I wish I had Tim with me," Ralph said to himself. "Tim would amuse me and make me laugh. It would be desperately cold for him. I am all right under my blanket and this warm coat. Well, I suppose I must try to sleep as many hours away as I can."



CHAPTER XX.

CROSSING THE LINES.

RALPH was destined to a longer stay upon his hay bed in the loft than he had anticipated. The next day, instead of being better he was a good deal worse ; inflammation had again set in, and he was feverish and incoherent in his talk. He was conscious of this himself, by seeing the dismay in the face of the nurse when he had been rambling on to her for some time in English. At last, with an effort, he commanded his attention and said to her,

“How far is it from here to Orleans ?”

“Seventeen miles,” she said.

“Look here,” he said, “you are very kind, and I know that you do not want to be paid for your kindness ; but I am well off, and I know you have lost your horse and cow, and so you must let me pay you for what you do for me. I am afraid I am going to have fever. I want your husband to go into Orleans. The Prussians went in yesterday, you say, and so your husband will not have

to cross any outposts to get there. There is an English ambulance there. I will write a line in pencil, and I am sure they will give him some fever medicine and any thing else I may require. Please feel in the breast pocket of my coat ; you will find a pocket-book with a pencil in it."

The woman did as he told her, and Ralph with a great effort wrote,

"I am an Englishman, though a captain in the French service: I am wounded with a sabre in the head, and am sheltered in a loft. Inflammation has set in, and I fear fever. I am obliged indeed to make a great effort to master it sufficiently to write this. Please send some fever medicine by the bearer, and some arrowroot, a lemon or two would be a great blessing—Ralph Barclay."

He then tore out the leaf, folded and directed it to the head of the English ambulance, Orleans.

"How is he to know the English ambulance ?"

"It has a red cross on a white ground as all the others have, and an English flag, that is a flag with red and white strips going from corner to corner and crossing each other in the middle. But any one will tell him."

"I am sure he will set out at once," the woman said, and left the loft.

In ten minutes she returned. "He has started," she said, "but not to Orleans. My husband, directly I gave him the message said that he had heard that there was an English ambulance at Terminiers attending to the wounded picked up on the battle-field. It is only five miles from here."

"Thank God for that," Ralph said.

Three hours later the farmer returned with a bottle of medicine, some arrowroot, lemons, a bottle of wine, some Liebig's essence of meat for making broth, and a message that the English surgeon would ride over as soon as he could get away. The farmer had given him detailed instructions for finding the house, but was afraid of stopping to act as his guide, as, had he been seen walking by the side of the surgeon's horse, the suspicions of any German they might encounter would be at once excited. The surgeon arrived an hour later, and was at once taken to Ralph's bedside. Ralph, however, could not speak to, or even recognize the presence of his countryman, for he was in a high state of fever. The surgeon examined his wound carefully.

"I think he will get over it," he said to the farmer's wife. "It is a nasty cut, but there is nothing dangerous in the wound itself. It is the general shock to the system, together with the hardships and suffering he had gone through. He is a mere boy, not above seventeen or eighteen. He says in his note he is a captain, but it can hardly be so."

"He is a captain, sir; there is his uniform hanging up."

"Yes," the surgeon said, "that is the uniform of a captain in the Staff, and he has got the commander's button of the legion of honour. I wonder who he can be. Ralph Barclay," he said thoughtfully, looking at the pencil note Ralph had sent him. "Ah, now I remember the name. I thought it was familiar to me. This is the young Englishman who made his way through the lines into Paris with despatches. He is a fine young fellow: we must do what we can for him."

“Could you take him into your hospital, sir?” the woman asked.

“He will be better where he is, if you will continue to nurse him.”

“Yes, I will do that, but I thought he would be so much better looked after in the hospital.”

“No,” the surgeon said, “that is just what he would not be. Every room is literally crowded with wounded, and wounds do infinitely better in fresh, pure air like this than in a room with a close atmosphere, and other bad wounds. The fever medicine I sent over will last him for some days. I have brought over a tin of little biscuits. Give him the fever medicine every two hours until there is a change, and whenever you can get him to take it, give him a little broth made of a spoonful of the essence of meat in a litre of boiling water, or for a change some arrowroot. I will show you how to make it when we get back to the house. Can you manage to stay with him? He will want a good deal of looking after for the next two days.”

“Yes, sir, I was talking to Jacques about it to-day : he will go over to the next village, it is only a mile away, and will fetch my sister who lives there to keep house for a bit.”

“That is capital,” the surgeon said. “And now watch attentively how I put this bandage on, and do it the same way once a day. When you have put the bandage on you must put wet cloths to his head as long as he remains delirious. I am awfully busy, but I will ride over again in three or four days to see how he is getting on. By-the-way, it may be an advantage to you if I give you a paper

signed by me to say that you are taking care of a wounded French officer at my request, as, although you wished to send him to the ambulance, I refused, because in the first place he could not bear moving, and in the second, the ambulance was as full as it could possibly hold. That will clear you in case any German parties come along and find him."

It was a week before Ralph opened his eyes with any consciousness of what he saw. He looked round with a vague wonderment as to where he was. In a minute or two a look of recognition came into his face. Looking round he saw that there were changes. A small piece had been sawn out of the shutter so as to let in air and light while it remained closed. A table and a chair were beside his bed. In a corner of the loft was a small flat stove, with a few embers glowing upon it, and a saucepan standing among them. Upon the opposite side of the loft to that where he was lying was a heap of hay similar to his own, with a figure rolled up in a blanket lying on it. For some time Ralph thought all this over in the vague wandering way peculiar to people recovering from a long illness. Most he puzzled over the occupant of the other bed, and at last concluded that it was some fugitive like himself. For some time he lay and watched the figure, until presently it moved, threw off the blanket and rose, and to his surprise he saw that it was his nurse.

"Thanks to all the saints!" she exclaimed, when she saw him looking at her. "You are better at last. I think that I was asleep, too. But you were sleeping so quiet, that I thought I would take a nap, for I was so sleepy."

"How long have I been here?" Ralph asked.

A a

“Just a week from the time the fever took you. The English doctor came over and saw you, and sent lots of things for you, and said you were not to be left; so I had the bed made up here, and my sister came over to take care of Jacques. And now you must not talk any more: drink this broth, and then go off to sleep again.”

Ralph complied: he was too tired and weak to ask any more questions, and it was not until next day that he heard of the obstinate battles which General Chanzy had fought on the 7th, 8th, and 10th, near Beaugency.

“Thank goodness,” Ralph said, “we can’t have been very badly beaten if we were able to fight three drawn battles within about twenty miles of a first defeat.”

For the next two days Ralph improved in health; then he had a relapse, and was very ill for some days; then he began steadily but slowly to gain strength. It was three weeks after his arrival at the cottage before he could walk, another week before he had recovered his strength sufficiently to think of moving. One of his first anxieties after recovering consciousness after his first and longest attack of fever, had been upon the subject of the terrible anxiety which they must be feeling at home respecting him. They would have heard from Colonel Tempé that he was missing, and as he would have been seen to fall, it was probable that he was reported as dead.

Ralph’s only consolation was, that as the Germans were at Dijon, the communication would be very slow and uncertain; and although it was now ten days since the engagement, it was possible, if he could but get a letter sent at once, that they would get it nearly, if not quite as

quickly as the one from Colonel Tempé, especially if, as was very probable, the colonel would be a great deal too engaged during the week's tremendous fighting which succeeded the day upon which Ralph was wounded for him to be able to write letters.

The first time that he saw the English surgeon he mentioned this anxiety, and the doctor at once offered to take charge of a letter, and to forward it with his own in the military post-bag, to the head-quarters of the ambulance at Versailles, together with a note to the head of the ambulance there, begging him to get it sent on in the first bag for Dijon. In this way it would arrive at its destination within four or five days at most of its leaving Orleans.

It was on the 2nd of January, exactly a month from the date of the fight in which he was wounded, that, after very many thanks to his kind host and hostess, and after forcing a handsome present upon them, Ralph started, in a peasant's dress which had been bought for him, for Orleans. He had still plenty of money with him, for he had drawn the reward of 50,000 francs in Paris. The greater portion of this money he had paid into the hands of a banker at Tours, but Percy and he had kept out a hundred pounds each, knowing by experience how useful it is in case of being taken prisoner to have plenty of money. Ralph's wound was still bound up with plaister, and to conceal it a rabbit-skin cap with flaps had been bought, so that by letting down the flaps and tying them under the chin the greater part of the cheeks were covered.

The farmer had made inquiries among his neighbours,

and finding one who was going into Orleans with a horse and cart, he had asked him to give Ralph a lift to that place.

The start had been effected early, and it was three o'clock when they drove into Orleans. Here Ralph shook hands with his driver, who wished him a safe journey home, and strolled leisurely down the streets. Orleans presented a miserable aspect. The inhabitants kept themselves shut up in their houses as much as possible; the bishop was kept a prisoner by the Prussians in his own palace, troops were quartered in every house, the inhabitants were for the most part in a state of poverty, and the shops would have been all shut, had not the Prussians ordered them to be kept open. The streets were thronged with German troops, and long trains of carts were on their way through with provisions for the army. These carts were requisitioned from the peasantry, and were frequently taken immense distances from home; the owner, or driver if the owner was rich enough to pay one, being obliged to accompany them.

Many were the sad scenes witnessed in these convoys. The grief of a father dragged away, not knowing what would become of his wife and children during his absence. The anguish of a labourer at seeing his horse fall dead with fatigue, knowing well that he had no means of taking his cart home again, and that he had nothing to do but to return to his home and tell his wife that the horse and cart, which constituted his sole wealth, were gone. Ralph waited, until late in the afternoon he saw a long train halt by one of the bridges. It was evidently intending to cross the next morning and go down south.

In a short time the horses were taken out and fastened by halters to the carts, two or three soldiers took up their posts as sentries, and the drivers were suffered to leave, the Germans knowing that there was no chance of their deserting and leaving their horses and carts.

The poor fellows dispersed through the town, those who had any money bought food, those who had not begged, for the Germans allowed them no rations, and left them to shift for themselves, or starve, as they liked. Ralph joined in conversation with a group of these, who were relating their hardships to two or three sympathetic listeners. An old man especially was almost heartbroken. His wife was dying, and he had been forced from her bedside.

“What could I do?” he asked pitifully. “I was a carrier; my horse and cart were all I had in the world: if I had not gone with them they were lost for ever: what was I to do?”

No one could answer him, but when the party had broken up Ralph went up to him.

“How much are your horse and cart worth?” he asked.

“The horse is worth five hundred francs,” he said; “the cart is an old one: two hundred and fifty would pay for it. It is not much you see, but it is all I have.”

“Look here, old man,” Ralph said; “I am not what I look: I am a French officer, and I want to get down near the Prussian outposts, but without passes I could not get on, besides I have been wounded, and am too weak to walk far. I will give you the seven hundred and fifty francs which are the value of your horse and cart, and

will take your place as driver, so that you can start back at once to your wife. Do you agree?"

The old man was so affected with joy that he burst into tears.

"God bless you, sir," he said, "you have saved my life, and my poor wife's life too."

"Very well, it is a bargain then," Ralph said; "here is half the money, you shall have the rest to-morrow. Now you must go with me to-morrow morning at the hour for starting, and tell the officer in charge that I am a nephew of yours living here, but out of work at present, and that you have arranged with me to drive the cart as long as it's wanted, and then to take it home again."

After a few more words the peasant took him back and showed him his cart, in order that he might know where to find him in the morning. "We start at day-break," he said, "so you had better be here by half-past six."

"Where do you sleep?" Ralph asked.

"I? Oh, I don't sleep much. I lie down for a bit underneath the carts, and then walk about to warm myself."

"Take this warm fur coat of mine," Ralph said, "it will keep you warm to night, anyhow; I shan't want it, I shall get a bed somewhere."

The coat was the one Ralph had worn on his night walk after being wounded. He had had all the braid and the fur of the collar and cuffs taken off, and had had it purposely dirtied so that it was no longer a garment which could attract attention on the back of a man with a cart.

After some difficulty, Ralph got a bed, and was at the

agreed place at the appointed time. The old man went up to the Prussian serjeant in command, and told the tale Ralph had dictated to him. The serjeant agreed to the arrangement with a brief nod, the old man handed Ralph his whip, and returned him the fur coat, which Ralph was glad enough to put on, for the morning was bitterly cold, and Ralph, enfeebled by his illness, felt it keenly. In another five minutes the carts were in motion across the bridge and then away due south.

For half an hour Ralph walked by the side of his cart, and being by that time thoroughly warm, he jumped up in the cart, and rode during the rest of the day, getting down and walking for a short time only when he found his feet getting numbed with the cold. In the afternoon they arrived at La Fertè, some fifteen miles from Orleans. There they remained for the night. There were not very many troops here, and Ralph could have obtained a bed by paying well for it, but he feared to attract attention by the possession of unusual funds, and therefore slept in a hay-loft, afraid, in spite of his fur coat, to sleep in the open air.

The next morning the train was divided, twenty of the carts going down towards Romorantin, while the rest, now fifteen in number, kept on towards Salbris. Ralph's cart formed part of this latter division. The night after they left La Ferté, they halted at La Motte Beuvron, where there was a strong force of Germans. The following day only four carts continued their route to Salbris, Ralph happening again to be among them. He had regretted two days before that he had not formed part of the division for Romorantin, as from that place he would have been less than twenty miles from Tours, which the Prus-

sians had not yet entered ; but as he had the good fortune to go on to Salbris, he did not mind, as Salbris, like Romorantin, was one of the most advanced stations.

They arrived late in the afternoon, and the carts were at once unloaded. The sergeant-in-charge told them to wait while he got their papers for them, and in ten minutes he returned.

“You will have to-morrow to rest your horses, and the next day a train will start for the north. Your work is over now, as there is nothing to go back. Here are the passes for you saying that you have carried goods down here for the army, and are therefore to return back without your carts being further requisitioned.”

Ralph put up his horse and cart for an hour in the village while he went to search for some farm house upon which no Prussian soldiers were quartered. He was unable for some time to find one ; but at last over a mile from this town he found a small place which had escaped the attention of the Prussian quarter-master, and where there was a small unoccupied stable. Ralph soon struck a bargain with its owner, returned to Salbris, mounted his cart, drove out, and was soon settled in the little farm house. He anticipated no great difficulty in passing out through the outposts as there was no French force of any importance near ; and the German troops interfered but little with the movements of the country people.

The affair, however, turned out more easy than he had anticipated, for towards morning he was awake by the distant sound of bugles. “Something is up,” he said to himself, “either a French attack, a general advance, or a recall.

If it should be the latter I am in luck." It turned out to be as Ralph hoped. The peasant in whose house he was stopping went into Salbris early, and came back with the news that there was no longer a German there. Orders had come for them to fall back towards Orleans. "I am not at all surprised," Ralph said, when he heard it, "for Orleans was emptying fast of troops. This sudden march of Bourbaki for the east, and the necessity to reinforce Frederick Charles near Vendôme, must try even Prussian resources to the utmost."

Half an hour later Ralph was jogging along on his way to Vierzon. There he found that the railway was open to Bourges, from which town he should have no difficulty in getting on to Dijon. He soon found a purchaser for his horse and cart at ten pounds, and the next morning started on his way home.





CHAPTER XXI.

HOME.

IT was a long journey from Vierzon to Dijon. At Bourges Ralph had taken advantage of a delay of some hours, necessitated by the fact that no train was going, to get some suitable clothes instead of the peasant's suit in which he had traversed the lines. He had of course brought his papers with him, so that he had no difficulty whatever in getting on by the train ; but the train itself made but slow work of it. Bourbaki had passed west only the week before with all his army, upon his march to the relief of Belfort, and the railway was completely choked. However, Ralph was not inclined to grumble at the cause of his delay, for it was only upon Bourbaki's approach that the Germans had evacuated Dijon, which was now held by Garibaldi's irregulars and a considerable force of Mobiles.

So great were the delays that it was evening when the train reached Dijon.

Ralph had scarcely stepped out on to the platform

when Percy bounded upon him and threw his arms round his neck.

"Dear, dear old Ralph; thank God you are back again."

"My dear Percy, where did you spring from?"

"I have been home five days. I was still down at Marseilles when I heard that Dijon was open again, and I came straight up. And how are you, Ralph?"

"Oh, I am getting all right again. How are they all at home?"

"Well, quite well, but dreadfully anxious about you."

By this time the boys were out of the station and were walking homewards.

"But you have not told me how you happened to be at the station."

"Well, I was waiting there just on the chance of seeing you. Mamma was so dreadfully anxious about you, that I wanted to do something. At any rate I could not sit quiet at home. There are never more than two trains with passengers in a day, sometimes only one; so I have been staying down in the town most of the days since I came home, having paid one of the railway people to send me word directly the train was telegraphed as starting from Dôle."

How long is it since my letter arrived?"

"Nearly three weeks, Ralph: fortunately it came four or five days before a letter from Tempé saying that he feared you were killed. Not having heard again they were terribly anxious."

"I had no means of writing," Ralph said. "The English ambulance, through whom my letter was sent,

moved down to Vendôme the very day after I wrote, and I had no other way of sending my letter."

"I said it was something of that sort. I pointed out to them that it was evident by what you said that the fever had passed off, and that you only wanted strength, but that, being in hiding, of course you could not write. I gave you three weeks to get strong enough to start, and four or five days to manage to get through the lines, so that by my calculation you were just due when you arrived. It has pulled you down, Ralph, very much. I wish I had been there to nurse you."

"Thank you, Percy. Fortunately I did fall into very good hands and was well looked after. I hope papa has not been over-anxious about me?"

"I think he has been nervous, Ralph, but he did not show it, but talked cheerfully to keep up mamma and Milly."

"And are you quite strong again, Percy?"

"Yes, I think I am nearly as strong as ever, Ralph. There, we are just at the house now. You had better wait outside while I go in and let them know gradually that you are home. I came in like a fool suddenly, and mamma fainted, she says for the first time in her life, and Milly went into hysterics, and cried and laughed so wildly that you might have heard her in Dijon. She frightened me nearly out of my senses."

Ralph remained accordingly outside the door while Percy went in alone. The others had finished tea.

"You are a little late, Percy," Mrs. Barclay said. "We gave you twenty minutes' law. It is not the least matter your being late, but I do not think it is

wise to be out these bitter nights until you are quite strong."

"I am quite strong, mamma, as strong as ever," Percy laughed ; but his laugh was, in spite of himself, a little unnatural. His father looked sharply up.

Percy sat down and drank a little of the tea his mother handed to him.

"I waited for the train to come in," he said, "and—of course it may not be so—but I heard of some one who, by the description, seemed to be Ralph."

"What was it, Percy, what was it?" Milly cried, while her mother gazed at him with a pale face and appealing eyes.

"Don't agitate yourself, mamma dear ; you see it may not be true after all ; but among the people in the train was one who had come straight from Bourges. I spoke to him, and he said that he had heard by a friend who had come straight from Vierzon, that a young officer had just arrived there in disguise who had been wounded and in hiding ever since the capture of Orleans. You know, mamma, it is just the time I calculated he would be coming, and from the fact of his being a young staff officer and in disguise I have very little doubt it is Ralph."

Captain Barclay rose from his seat, and standing for a moment behind his wife's chair, looked at Percy, and then at the door inquiringly. Percy nodded.

Captain Barclay leant over and kissed his wife. "Thank God, dear, for all His mercies ! Another day or two and we shall be having him home."

"Thank God, indeed !" Mrs. Barclay said ; "but

though I hope, though I try to think it was him, perhaps it was not, perhaps—”

“No, mamma,” Percy said; “from some particulars he gave, and from what he said, I feel almost sure, I may say I am quite sure, it is Ralph. I would not say so you know unless I felt very certain.”

Mrs. Barclay felt that he would not, and fell into her husband’s arms, crying softly with happiness.

Milly was no longer in the room. She had caught the glance between her father and Percy, and had rightly interpreted it. She had risen to her feet, but a warning gesture from Captain Barclay had checked the cry of gladness on her lips, and she had stolen quietly from the room, closed the door noiselessly, had flown to the front door and out into the road beyond, and was now crying happily in Ralph’s arms.

“And when do you think he can get here, Richard?” Mrs. Barclay asked her husband.

“Soon, dear; quite soon,” he answered; “he may come to-morrow. He would be certain to come almost as quickly as the news.”

“Oh, how happy I am!” Mrs. Barclay said. “Thank God for His mercies! To think that to-morrow I may have both my boys back again.”

“Will there be another train in to-night, Percy?” Captain Barclay asked.

“Quite possibly,” Percy said; “indeed, indeed—” and he hesitated, “you see I walked up fast; it is just possible that he may have arrived by this train.”

Mrs. Barclay understood now.

“He is come,” she exclaimed, looking up. “I know it now.”

Captain Barclay took her up in his arms. "You can bear it, can't you, Millicent? Yes, dear, he has come."

Percy saw that it was safe now. He went to the door and opened it. Ralph was standing outside in readiness, and in another moment his mother was in his arms.

Later in the evening Captain Barclay said to Ralph, "I suppose to-morrow you will obtain a medical certificate, and write to General Chanzy, saying that you are alive, but unable to rejoin?"

"Yes," Ralph answered; "I suppose that will be the best plan. I must have a month's rest."

"That means, my dear boy, that you will not have to go out any more. Another month will see the end of the struggle; or at any rate if the end has not absolutely arrived, it will be unmistakable. The game is, I am convinced, altogether lost. A fortnight ago I had still hope. Chanzy and Bourbaki had each an army nearly or quite equal to that of Prince Frederick Charles. He could not attack one in force without leaving the road to Paris open to the other. Bourbaki has come upon this mad expedition to the east, and you will see Prince Frederick Charles will throw his whole strength upon Chanzy, crush him, and then attend to Bourbaki. Bourbaki may relieve Belfort, but in that corner of France what is he to do? Prussian reinforcements are coming down to Werder every day. Troops are marching on this town from Paris, and if Bourbaki is not wonderfully quick we shall have another Sedan here. After the defeat of these, the last two armies of France, it would be madness to continue the war. Paris must surrender, for there would be no farther possibility

of relief, and there would be no advantage whatever in enduring further sufferings. No, my boys, I said 'Go,' when I thought that there was a possibility of saving France. You have done your duty, more than your duty. It would be worse than folly, it would be wickedness to voluntarily put your lives into danger, when success has ceased to be possible. I should be the last man to hinder you from what was your duty. I said 'Go' before, when few fathers would have said so. I would say 'Go' again now if your duty called you; but as you can both obtain sick leave for another six weeks, I say take that leave; do not do more than your duty; for heroism is now of no use to France."

"I agree with you altogether, papa," Ralph said. "I have seen and had quite enough fighting for my lifetime. Of course, if the war goes on, Percy and I, as officers, must return to our duty; but I am willing to obtain all the sick leave I can get, for although I still believe in the individual bravery of the French soldiers, I am quite convinced that it is altogether out of the question that, with their want of organization, want of generals, want of officers, want of discipline, want of everything, they can drive out the magnificent armies of Germany. Has Percy got his leave extended?"

"Yes," Percy said: "I am fairly well, but I am still shaky. I have not quite got over that swim, and the surgeon said, without my applying for it, that I must have prolonged rest, so at the end of the month he extended it for two months longer. I thoroughly agree with you both; we have had quite enough of it. We shall always have the satisfaction that we did our duty to

France, and our rank, and these ribbons," and he touched the rosette of the legion of honour in his button-hole, "will prove that we have distinguished ourselves. We have had great good fortune hitherto; it might turn next time."

And so it was settled that the boys should remain at home for the next two months, by which time they agreed with their father the resistance would be fairly worn out.

Ralph wrote to General Chanzy, relating the whole circumstances of his absence. General Chanzy wrote in reply, in spite of the demands upon his time, saying how pleased he was that Ralph had escaped, as he had quite given him up. He ended his note by saying that he had already mentioned his name in despatches and should now make a fresh report. Colonel Tempé, or rather General Tempé, for he now commanded a brigade, wrote also to congratulate him. One portion of his letter contained bad news, for he mentioned that Tim had lost an arm at the battle of the 8th December, but that he was now doing well.

Those were exciting days at Dijon. The news of the victory at Villersexel, followed by the fighting which ended in the capture of Montbeliard, and then the obstinate contests near Belfort, when Bourbaki in vain endeavoured to drive back the Germans and to relieve the besieged town; all this kept the excitement up at fever heat.

It was not fated that the war should end without the boys seeing service once more. For upon the 21st heavy firing was heard upon the north-west of Dijon. The Barclays' house was on the south-west of the town. Upon the

north-west the ground rises in two steep hills, or rather one steep hill, with two summits about a mile apart. One of these summits is called Talant the other Fontaine les Dijon. Behind the latter, and upon even higher ground, at a distance of two and three miles respectively, lay the villages of Daix and Hautville.

It was about ten o'clock in the morning that the boys heard the faint boom of a cannon.

"Listen, papa," Percy shouted ; "there are cannon. The Prussians are attacking the heights on the other side."

Captain Barclay came out into the garden and listened for awhile with them. The enemy had taken up positions upon some of the numerous heights surrounding, and were playing upon the batteries at Talant, Fontaine les Dijon, Daix, and Hauteville. The French replied vigorously, and it was evident that they were stronger in artillery than were the enemy.

"I fancy," Captain Barclay said, "that it is no attack. It is merely, I think, a fire opened to occupy our attention, in order that a body of troops may pass along to the northward of Dijon to fall upon Bourbaki's rear. However, my place is with my company of national guards. There is no fear of an attack at present, but they will get under arms no doubt."

"We will go down into the town with you, papa."

The firing continued until five o'clock, when it gradually died away, the Germans retiring. An hour later the greater portion of the troops marched back to the town. The enemy, they reported, were not over 15,000 strong, while in all the Garibaldians and mobilised national

guards in the town were from 30,000 to 40,000 strong. The French were also much stronger in artillery.

Captain Barclay returned home with the boys. They sat up late talking over the affair, and it was nearly midnight when they went up to their rooms. Suddenly they were startled by a fresh outburst of fire upon the heights. In a minute or two all the household were in the garden.

"It is a night attack," Captain Barclay said; "and judging by the sound they are in earnest. I can hear musketry as well as artillery."

As they listened it came nearer.

"They have taken Daix and Hauteville," Ralph said. "What shall we do, papa? We can't stay here quiet. It is our plain duty to go down and report ourselves to General Pelissier."

"I think you ought to do so," Captain Barclay answered gravely.

The boys went off to put on their uniforms, for Ralph had replaced the one he had left behind in the cottage near Orleans.

"I do not think you need be uneasy, Millicent," Captain Barclay said to his wife. "It is our duty to go; but I hardly think that they can have been reinforced in sufficient strength to attack the town."

The boys were soon down.

"Good-bye, mamma; good-bye, Milly; don't be alarmed about us; we have no horses, and there can be no risk of our being sent on any perilous service to-night."

Two silent kisses and then father and sons hurried away towards the town.

“They have taken Fontaine les Dijon,” Ralph said. “We shall soon see if they are in earnest.”

Dijon they found in utter confusion. Mounted orderlies galloped about ; the troops were all under arms ; engineers were at work crenelating the walls and houses upon the side threatened with attack. General Garibaldi was sitting in his carriage in readiness to move in any direction instantly. General Pelissier, who commanded the mobilised guards, was in his office, and staff officers came in and out with reports every five minutes.

The boys entered and briefly reported themselves for service. They had already reported their presence in the place upon their arrival.

“Thank you, gentlemen,” he said. “I do not think that you can be of any use just at present, but if the Germans press the attack I shall be greatly obliged. In that case please dismount two of the orderlies and take their horses.”

The night passed off, however, quietly ; the Germans, satisfied with the advantage, remained in the positions they had taken, and the French prepared to drive them back again in the morning.

At daybreak the troops began to pour out from the town, and the cannonade commenced with greater fury on both sides. Two of the orderlies, in obedience to General Pelissier's orders, gave up their horses to the Barclays, who rode out with the General's staff. The Prussians had evidently been reinforced in the night, but the French nevertheless gained ground gradually. After several hours' heavy cannonading, the mobilisés were ordered to take the position of Fontaine les Dijon with the

bayonet. Three Zouaves, who happened to be present, took their places at the head of the column, and at the double they went up the hill amidst a storm of shot and shell. The Germans did not await the assault, but fell back upon Daix. The spirit of the mobilisés was now up, and still led by the three Zouaves, they dashed forward. The resistance here was obstinate, but the Germans were driven back with great loss. The pursuers gave them no rest, but went forward at the double and drove them out of Hauteville at the bayonet's point, thus winning back all the positions lost in the night. The Barclays had little to do during the affair, as after the orders had once been given the spirit of the troops carried them on over everything. The loss upon both sides was considerable, and one of General Werder's sons was among the prisoners taken by the French.

The fight over, the boys returned home for a few hours. Their father had come in half an hour before them.

The next morning they returned at daybreak to Dijon. The Prussians had received considerable reinforcements in the night, and had executed a long detour, advancing this time by the Langres Road nearly due north of the city. They left the road, and took up their position upon a plateau near the village of Pouilly, about three miles from Dijon. The French positions were about a mile nearer to the town, extending from the foot of Fontaine les Dijon through the villages of St. Marten and Fontaine.

From the morning until three in the day a heavy artillery fire was kept up on both sides. At that hour the Prussians gave signs of an intention to advance:

their artillery took up fresh positions, their fire increased in rapidity, and it was evident that the crisis of the day was at hand. Up to this time the boys had had but little to do. Sitting on their horses, or leaning against them, they had chatted with the officers of the general staff. At this period, however, General Garibaldi drew up, and there was a brief consultation between him and General Pelissier. A few hasty orders were given, and in an instant the whole of the staff were dashing away to different parts of the ground.

“Charge in line !” was the order, and forming shoulder to shoulder, the Garibaldians and Mobiles moved forward in a grand line a mile and a half long, uttering loud and inspiring cheers. The boys had been sent to the regiments next to each other, and their message delivered they joined each other and rode on with the advancing line.

“This is grand, Ralph,” Percy said enthusiastically. “We have seen a good many defeats ; we are going to wind up with a victory at last.”

For a while the Germans stood their ground, pouring a shower of shot and shell into the advancing French ; but the dash and go of the latter, excited by their successes of the two preceding days, were irresistible. The Germans wavered and fell back as the French advanced, and from that moment the fate of the day was decided. Isolated German regiments fought desperately, but in vain. The French pushed them back from position to position, until nightfall covered the retreat.

The German loss was very heavy, and the French, in addition to a considerable number of prisoners, had the

satisfaction of taking a German colour, the only one captured throughout the war.

This was the last fight in which the Barclays took part during the war. The boys escaped unhurt, as did their father, who had joined one of the regiments of Mobs, and had advanced with them.

The events followed fast, day after day. In rapid succession they heard of the defeat of Chanzy at Le Mans, the retreat of Bourbaki, the terrible sufferings of the troops as they fell back upon the Swiss frontier for refuge. Simultaneously with the news of this retreat came the intelligence of the surrender of Paris and of the armistice; and grieving over France's misfortune, they were yet heartily rejoiced that the hopeless contest was over.

No sooner were the preliminaries of peace signed than Captain Barclay carried out his intention of leaving for England. M. Duburg had already agreed to purchase the cottage and adjoining grounds, which he intends for Louis when he marries. The Barclays were sorry to leave their uncle and cousins, but there was no great grief with reference to the separation from Madame Duburg. General Tempé they parted from with regret. That officer's fighting days were over, for he lost a leg in the battle before Le Mans.

Ralph obtained the step as major, in consequence of General Chanzy's report in his favour, but he never put on the uniform of the rank, nor is it likely that he ever will do so, although he hopes some day to attain the grade in the British service. He is at present studying hard for an examination in the artillery, which, if practical knowledge goes for anything, he is

pretty certain to get. Percy has had enough of fighting, and his present idea is that he shall go to the bar ; but he has plenty of time before him yet. Both never boast of their achievements, indeed, are straightforward, unaffected English lads still, and it is only to intimate friends that they ever speak of their adventures in the war.

The Barclays live now a short distance out of London, and the pony-chaise in which Captain Barclay drives his wife and Milly can be seen any day on the Richmond road. If you stop and watch it turn into the little drive up to the house, you will observe that a one-armed man, who has previously been busy in the garden, throws down his spade and takes the ponies off to the stables ; and should he not happen to be at the front of the house as the ponies draw up, you will hear Milly summon him with a loud call of " Tim !"



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